

Changing Political Landscapes for Latinos in America

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Over the past few decades, the political landscape of the United States has been transformed with the tremendous growth of the Latino population. With over 50 million Latinos currently living in the United States, it makes them the largest and youngest minority group in the country. Their numerical growth is impressive given that in the last decade alone the Latino population increased by over 15 million. This increased demographic presence has gradually resulted in growing political influence and representation. For example, President Obama made history in 2009 when he appointed Sonia Sotomayor as the first Latina to the U.S. Supreme Court. No doubt this is the first of many firsts for the Latino community. This growing presence and influence has altered the American political landscape, drawing sudden attention among scholars, the media, and political pundits. Because of immigration growth as well as a birthrate exceeding that of Anglos and African Americans, Latinos are poised to become an even more powerful voting bloc in years to come. Through the analysis of four key areas, we argue that the Latino influence in American politics is beginning to exert itself in unprecedented ways, which will culminate, we hope, in the full incorporation of Hispanics in American political life.

This paper will explore the changing political landscape for Latinos in the United States in the areas of demographics, political behavior and attitudes, representation in legislative institutions, and public policy. First, we will investigate the growing electoral strength of the Latino vote. Some have called this growing Latino population a “sleeping giant” which will soon emerge to become a force to be reckoned with in politics. How did this rapid change occur to a community which only fifty years ago was marginalized and concentrated in only a few Southwestern states? Although Latino registration and voting rates have long been significantly lower than their population figures would suggest, Latino electoral participation has made significant gains. From 2000 to 2008, Latino voter turnout increased by 64 percent with

registration seeing a similar rise of 54 percent. These increases have been a result of the growth of the voting age population which has experienced greater mobilization and incorporation for reasons we will discuss.

The geographic concentration of Latinos in certain key states has enabled them to exert their political influence. It is in heavily Latino states like Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida, where Latinos have been able to exert a more prominent influence in electoral races. In recent years, we have seen Latino immigration to non-traditional destination states in the South. The political implications of this “new Latino South” are still not fully explored.

Second, this paper will investigate the growing Latino representation that has in part resulted from rising electoral participation as well as other factors, such as redistricting, institutional designs of legislatures, and the mainstreaming of Latinos in the United States.

Third, we will discuss the more prominent role that Latinos are holding within party politics. Every election year, we see both parties increasing courting Latino voters with Latino friendly messages and Spanish-Language advertising. The state of Latino partisanship in the United States has faced a great degree of speculation and interest. In recent years some have speculated the Latino vote to be in fact “up for grabs,” with foreign-born Latinos being a prime target for Republican efforts. The future trajectory of Latino partisanship is clearly in question, which could bring significant changes to Latino party influence and party politics in general.

Lastly, this paper will analyze some of the policy implications that could result from Latino political influence. If the two parties are seeking to make gains among this young immigrant population, policies regarding education, jobs, and health care are “bread-and-butter”

issues that Latinos deeply care about. Since approximately 35 percent of Latinos are under the age of 18, education policy has a unique role. Basic educational attainment is serious issue in Latinos communities with over 40 percent of adult Latinos having dropped out of high school. Access to higher education is also an important policy issue that received increased attention particularly with new efforts to pass the DREAM Act. Although we should expect greater political influence to lead to the enactment of policies that better serve Latino interests, the reality is that policy gains have not come easy to Latino communities. Future policy gains may require not only greater participation among Latino voters, but a more diversified strategy by Latino elected officials and leaders in higher education.

I. Growing Latino Demographics

The news media has recently paid particular attention to the dramatic population growth of Latinos in the United States. As demonstrated in Figure 1, since the 1970's the Latino population has grown dramatically, and the projected growth of this population is just as remarkable. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, there are approximate 50.5 million Latinos in the United States, making up approximately 16.3 percent of the United States population (Passel et al. 2011). In the last decade alone, the nation's Latino population grew by over 46 percent, which was more than four times the growth rate of the total U.S. population. By 2050, Latinos are expected to make up about a quarter of the U.S. population with a projected 102.6 million Latinos living in the United States. This projected growth is remarkable when considering that in 1970 Latinos accounted for less than five percent of the U.S. population. Since 2000, Latinos population growth has accounted for approximately half of all population growth in the United States, which not only makes them the largest, but also the fastest growing minority group in the country. The Asian

population is the only group rivaling the growth rate of Latinos, but their total population lags significantly behind Latinos.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

This is a population that has grown not only as a result of natural increase, but also through various waves of migration. In the 1990's, the majority (56 percent) of this group's population growth was due to immigration. This immigration was propelled by not only Mexican migration, but also a growing migration among Central Americans that had begun in the previous decade. But since 2000, we have seen a turnaround, with approximately 60 percent of Latino population growth being driven by natural increase, rather than immigration (Fry 2008). These trends have resulted in a burgeoning young native-born Latino population that is just beginning to transform the American political landscape.

In comparison to whites, Latinos have significantly higher birth rates, which have resulted in Latinos being a much younger population than non-Hispanic whites. This is evident when comparing the median age of groups, for the median age of Latinos is 27, whereas for whites the median age is 41. The youthfulness of this population is truly a phenomenon among the native-born. As of 2009, approximately 27 percent of native-born Latinos are under the age of 19, whereas only about 5 percent of foreign-born Latinos are under 19. Among whites, a little over 11 percent of population is under the age of 19 (Pew Hispanic Center 2011). It is this young native-born Latino population that will pose important political and policy challenges and changes in the coming years.

Latinos as a group are not monolithic; rather there they are diverse population with significant commonalities but also vast differences. They are a pan-ethnic group that is a self-

made construct. It groups recent immigrants who may have limited English-speaking ability, with second- and -third generation Latinos who may have limited Spanish-speaking skills. Latinos also differ in regards to national-origin. They come from a large number of Spanish-speaking countries with the majority coming from Mexico. These differences in national-origin have resulted in Latinos having distinct historical trajectories in the United States. Latinos can have differing levels of political incorporation, language differences, and national-origins, which make them a diverse ethnic group.

Latino migration and growth in the United States has traditionally followed a path of geographic concentration in certain key states, as opposed to a general dispersion. As seen in Table 1, in the top six Latino population states, the Southwest disproportionately represents the Latino population with large concentrations from Mexican origins. California is the predominant location for Latinos with over 13 million Latinos, but even more remarkable is that Los Angeles County alone has 4.6 million Latino residents (Passel et al. 2011). Only California and Texas have more Latinos in their population. Latinos make up approximate 37 percent of the total population in California and Texas, which is a substantial portion of each state's population. Although fewer than Los Angeles County, Florida and New York also have a large Latino population, with substantial numbers of Cuban and Puerto Rican origin residents. Arizona, which is the fourth most populous Latino state, rounds out the Southwestern states with over two million Latinos. With the inclusion of Illinois rounding out the top six, these states are considered to be traditional Latino migration states.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

In recent years, we have seen increased Latino immigration to non-traditional destination states, particularly in the Southeast. As shown in Table 2, in the last decade, there has been a high Latino population growth rate in states outside of the Southwest. From 2000 to 2009, the states of South Carolina and Arkansas have experienced over 100 percent growth in their Latino population. Both North Carolina and Georgia, also have had significant Latino growth rates, and now have a substantial Latino population in both states. In the same time period, both Minnesota and Kentucky have also experienced significant Latino growth rates. Although Latino growth rates have been significant in these states, their total population numbers are still quite modest compared to traditional Latino destination states.

Still, the demographic changes in these Southern states have spurred calls to the making of a “new Latino South”. Latino population growth in these southern states became evident starting in the 1990’s—a growth that has only expanded in the last twenty years. Of the Latinos coming to these southern states, the majority are foreign-born (57 percent), largely male, uneducated and young (Kochhar et al. 2006). These young Latino males come to these new destinations in order to follow the job opportunities that have become available. Given that they have greater mobility, they have settled in the south because of the need for their labor. These southeastern states have had no previous historical experience with Latino immigration, leading to a lack of infrastructure in place to adequately address the needs of this growing population (Smith 2001). Currently, the political implications of this “new Latino South” have just begun to be properly explored. We do know that these demographic changes have raised new concerns regarding education, housing, and poverty policies.

[Insert Table 2 Here]

II. Latino Political Influence and Representation

Given the uneven concentration of Latinos across U.S. states, their political influence within each state varies significantly. The geographic concentration of Latinos in certain key states has enabled them to exert greater political influence in these specific states. Latino political presence is more evident in states where they are more heavily concentrated, such as states in the southwest. It is in heavily Latino states like California, New York, Texas, Illinois and Florida, where Latinos have been able to exert a more prominent influence in electoral races. Especially in local races, Latinos have been able to exert influence in Southern California and South Texas. Most Latino representatives in Congress are from California and Texas. Additionally, with Latinos being heavy concentration in these electoral-college-rich states, it has increased their visibility and attention in national elections. This is less true in California and Texas, which are not “swing” states in recent presidential elections. Nevertheless, in Florida and New Mexico, states with significant Latino populations, presidential campaigns have made concerted efforts to reach out to Latinos in order to win precious electoral votes.

Although Latino registration and voting rates have long been significantly lower than their population figures would suggest, Latino electoral participation has made significant gains. As seen in Figure 2, the Latino electorate, as a whole, has been become a more prominent part of the general electorate. From 2000 to 2008, the total eligible Latino voting population increased by over five million. During that same time period, Latino voter turnout increased by 64 percent with registration rates seeing a similar rise of 54 percent. These increases have been a result of the growth of the voting age population which has experienced greater mobilization and incorporation. In 2008, over 11 million Latinos voted, but with an eligible voting population of over 19 million there remains significant gap in voting participation among this population.

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

One reason for this participation gap is that Latinos disproportionately represent a low socio-economic status group. Traditionally, it is the young, less educated and low income that are less likely to vote, and it is these groups that Latinos tend to represent (DeSipio and de la Garza 2002). Moreover, Latinos have been historically disenfranchised and ignored in the American political sphere, and thus there remains a need for greater mobilization and socialization into the political process.

Latinos also suffer from a large non-eligible voting population that has further limited their voting potential. Approximately 37 percent of Latinos are foreign-born, and only about 29 percent of those foreign-born Latinos are actually U.S. citizens (Pew Hispanic 2009). With such a large non-citizen population, this leaves a substantial percentage of the U.S. Latino population ineligible to vote.

There have been efforts to increase citizenship rates among the foreign-born population with mobilization and incorporation efforts. In the mid-1990's there was a surge in naturalization rates among Latinos, with over 2.4 million becoming naturalized from 1995 to 2001 (DeSipio and de la Garza 2002). Although naturalization allows foreign-born Latinos the possibility of joining the voting electorate, they face many challenges which continue to hinder their participation rates. Like Latinos as a whole, their lower socio-economic status makes them less likely to participate. Additionally, given that foreign-born Latinos lack any parental socialization in the U.S. political process, they are generally less familiar with the political process and require greater guidance and mobilization.

Additionally, the youthfulness of the Latino population has also contributed to limiting their potential as a voting bloc. Approximately 35 percent of Latinos are under the age of 18; this is substantially higher than non-Hispanic whites who have only 21 percent below the age of 18. These young Latinos represent a significant potential voting group as they continue to reach voting age. As seen in Figure 3, the number of Latinos reaching voting age by election cycle has seen continued growth from 2002-2010. In 2010 elections, over 1.3 million Latinos reached voting age, which added a substantial increase to the potential Latino electorate. Increasing foreign-born Latinos citizenship rates, coupled with the natural increase of Latinos reaching voting age, shows that there is potentially much promise in increasing Latino electoral participation.

[Insert Figure 3 Here]

III. Latinos and the Political Parties

Every presidential election cycle, we see both parties increasing courting Latino voters with Latino friendly messages and Spanish-language advertising. The state of Latino partisanship in the United States has faced a great degree of speculation and interest. In recent years some have speculated the Latino vote to be in fact “up for grabs,” with foreign-born Latinos being a prime target for Republican efforts. The future trajectory of Latino partisanship is clearly in question, which could bring significant changes to Latino party influence and party politics in general.

The state of Latino partisanship in the United States has faced a great degree of speculation and interest. Non-Cuban Latinos have traditionally been considered to be solid Democrats with the Latino vote being largely assured to the Democratic Party. In recent years some political commentators have speculated that this affiliation is not as strong as some have suggested, and

they have proclaimed that the Latino vote may in fact be “up for grabs”. The future trajectory of Latino partisanship is clearly in question. Will Latinos maintain their support for the Democratic Party or will the Republican Party become an increasingly attractive alternative?

Historically, except for Cubans, Latinos have largely been aligned with the Democratic Party. The relationship between the Republican Party and Latinos can be described as being strained at best. To be a Latino and a Republican was once considered an anomaly. For many years, particularly in the mid-1990s, the Republican Party considered Latinos to be like African Americans, a vote with little chance of being captured. Since then, many Republican strategists have pointed to the Latino vote as one that the Republican Party can make gains upon. Strategists point to Latino social conservatism and their expected rising economic mobility as signs of potential opportunities for the Republican Party. This has left many scholars to answer the question of whether the Latino vote is in actuality a vote that the Republican Party has an opportunity of capturing.

One of the primary factors that appears to be hindering Republican efforts towards Latinos is party image and perception, for traditionally Latinos have viewed the Democratic Party in a more favorable light than the Republican Party. Historically, Latinos have been attached to the Democratic Party and have developed an antagonistic relationship with the Republican Party (Coffin 2003). The Democratic Party has developed an image of being more receptive to the needs of disadvantaged groups, and protective of the needs of ethnic and racial minorities (Hero et al. 2000). Latino groups like Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans have traditionally viewed the Democratic Party as supporters of pro-immigrant issues, promoters of social services, and representatives of the poor and working class. In contrast, the Republican Party has been tied with an anti-immigrant agenda and cuts in social services. This general

unfavorable perception of the Republican Party in the minds of many Latinos has created quite a barrier for the party and its prospects for conversion. To be sure, some Republicans, such as former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, have made efforts to renounce some of the anti-immigrant rhetoric coming from some extreme Republicans.

The relationship of Cuban-origin Latinos to the Republican Party is quite different from that of other Latino national-origin groups. This is due to the historical experiences of Cubans in the United States being distinct from other Latino groups. The strong anti-Castro response by the Republican Party attracted many Cuban exiles to the party. The Republican Party was able to capture the issue that dominated the exile community whereas the Democratic Party appeared too soft at dealing with the Castro regime. For Cuban-origin Latinos, the Republican Party has been seen as the most protective of their needs specifically by maintaining a hard-line stance against the Castro regime. Additionally, Cubans' attraction to the Republican Party has been influenced by their unique concentration and community development in the state of Florida (Moreno and Warren 1992).

As seen in Figure 4, with the exception of Cubans, over time Latino perception of the Republican Party has been generally poor. From 2002 to 2010, when asked which party is more concerned about Latinos/Hispanics, the percentage of registered Latino voters who have felt that the Republican Party is most concerned about Latinos/Hispanics has never risen above 11 percent. Although there have been some efforts to make the Republican Party more attractive to Latinos, the recent evidence for 2008 and 2010 suggest that Latinos are currently less likely to believe that the Republican Party is more concerned for Latinos in comparison to the Democratic Party, which suggests that former Gov. Jeb Bush has much work to do to convince Hispanics that Republicans are a viable alternative.

[Insert Figure 4 Here]

In evaluating Latino party identification, in the aggregate, Latinos appear quite stable in their partisanship preference. Latinos have typically favored the Democratic Party. As seen in Figure 5, from 1999 to 2010, Latino partisan identification among registered voters has experienced only minor changes. Latino attachment to the Republican Party has only varied about 5 percentage points from 23 to 28 percent. Latinos' Democratic affiliation has always been substantially higher than their Republican affiliation, but with greater fluctuations. James Gimpel (2004) also echoes this belief with his finding of a largely stable Democratic affiliation among Latinos. His work has shown a remarkably stable Latino partisan identification with Latinos favoring the Democratic Party by at least a two to one margin.

[Insert Figure 5 Here]

Analysis of Latino voting behavior presents a largely stable picture of Latino voting behavior. In U.S. presidential elections, Democrats have received solid support from Latinos typically averaging 65 percent of the Latino vote. Although the Republican Party received substantially less supports from Latinos, the Republican Party does carry a baseline of support among the Latino population. Gimpel and Kaufmann (2001, 1) find that "Republicans can count on 20 to 25 percent of the Hispanic vote in most states, regardless of what they do." Depending on the political context, the Republican Party may need to mobilize a greater portion of the Latino vote or they could choose to abandon any further efforts to mobilize and convert Latino voters to the party. The latter would be problematic in many ways, not the least of which is that two party competition is a necessary, but not sufficient, prescription for effective representation.

However, Republican presidential candidates have at times made more significant

inroads with Latinos, leading some to consider Latinos “swing voters.” In 1972, Richard M. Nixon became the first Republican presidential candidate to direct attention to Latinos with his pioneering “Hispanic strategy”, when he received approximately 35 percent of the Latino vote (Sanchez 2007). In 1980 and 1984, Ronald Reagan was able to capture a substantial sector of the Latino vote attaining a high of 37 percent. Republicans would not again reach such a high level of support until the 2000 election of Texas Gov. George W. Bush when he received Nixon’s high of 35 percent of the Latino vote. Findings by de la Garza (2004) indicate that much of Bush’s support in 2000 was due to the fact of Latinos favoring the candidate himself as opposed to the more wooden Vice President Albert Gore.

In 2004, Bush’s support further increased to an unprecedented percent of the Latino vote. Initial exit polls had originally reported Bush had received as much as 44 percent of the Latino, although since then those figures have been contested. In actuality, Latino support for Bush was most likely around 37 to 39 percent, which is still a substantial increase over the 1996 bottom of Bob Dole’s lackluster showing (Leal et al. 2005). Although this represented significant gains for a Republican candidate among Latino voters, this increased support appears to have been candidate specific and temporal in nature. Increases in support were most likely due to a personal favoring of President Bush, and increased turnout among Latino Republicans. Still, there is little evidence of an actual Latino partisan realignment (Gimpel and Kaufmann 2001; de la Garza 2004).

In 2008, Latinos returned to their usual levels of support for the Democratic Party with the Republican candidate Senator John S. McCain (R-Arizona) receiving only 31 percent of the Latino vote (Preston 2008). Although there was some debate over to what extent Latinos would support the African-American candidate Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL), results revealed that

Latinos maintained their traditional levels of support for the Democratic candidate regardless of his race. Overall, the Republican Party experienced declining levels of support among the electorate in this election, and the Latino vote represented a reflection of this general trend away from the Republican Party.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Despite President Bush's efforts, Mexican Americans have remained loyal to the Democratic Party as most local officials and members of Congress are Democrats. However, the 2010 elections posed an interesting and new development heretofore unseen in Hispanic politics. Five Latino Republicans were elected to the State House in Texas, and two were elected to the U.S. Congress from Texas. In addition, Marco Rubio, a Cuban American Republican from Florida, soundly defeated his opponents for an open U.S. Senate seat. Washington State also elected a Latina Republican to Congress from a mostly white congressional district. Raul Labrador, a Puerto Rican born tea party Republican, defeated an incumbent Democrat in Idaho to become the first ever Latino representative from that state. While none of these candidates received a majority of the Latino vote in their election, the Republican Party is attempting to rebrand its image as an all-white party by highlighting these new (brown) faces.

What does this mean for Latino representation in Texas and nationwide? Will the state party recruit and fund Hispanic candidates to run for more offices? One challenge is that Hispanic Republicans need to get past white primary voters in the Southwest. In 2010, Victor Carrillo, the only statewide elected Hispanic Republican in Texas, lost his primary as an incumbent despite endorsements from all of the statewide elected officials, including Gov. Rick Perry. Ted Cruz, the former solicitor general, is waging a campaign for the U.S. Senate, but he faces the same

challenge that Carrillo faced. Is there a disconnect between the elites in the party who want to promote Hispanics, and the rank and file who would prefer a homogenous party? If so, how will this be reconciled, if at all?

In Texas, Rep. Aaron Pena, an Edinburg state representative switched to the Republican Party giving the party a supermajority in the Texas House. While many Hispanic civil rights organizations and leaders slammed Pena as a traitor, the state party has attempted to highlight this switch as emblematic of the party's newfound willingness to court Latinos. Given Pena's strongly Democratic district, many have questioned why he would switch. Explanations range from being promised a cleared Republican primary for one of the four new congressional seats to a newfound realization that he was more in line with the Republicans. Pena, along with his Republican Latino colleagues, have criticized some efforts by Reps. Leo Berman (R-Tyler) and Debbie Riddle (R-Tomball) to propose legislation akin to Arizona's anti-immigrant SB 1070. Paul Burka of Texas Monthly has argued that there are really three parties in Texas: Republicans, Tea Partyers, and Democrats. The Tea Party caucus in the Texas House poses a threat to the establishment Republicans and their efforts to at least superficially reach out to Hispanics. This phenomenon is also readily apparent in other Southwestern states, although Arizona Republicans seem to have done all they can to alienate the Latino population in that state.

Casellas (2011) has noted that minority representation in state legislatures can be explained by several factors, including elite driven methods. Elite driven methods include redistricting, appointments, and recruitments by party leaders. In Texas, Republicans are finally coming to the realization that they need to recruit Hispanics to run in coalition districts. While they know they will not gain a majority of Hispanic votes, they only need to convince whites to vote for Hispanic Republicans, and gain a respectable portion of the Latino vote (30 percent depending on the

district). Tea partiers, however, may view such Republicans as “RINO’s” because of their generally moderate positions on immigration in particular.

[Insert Table 4 and 5 here]

Casellas (2011) also estimates statistical probabilities to show the extent to which state legislative designs affect the representation of Latinos in state legislatures and Congress. The percentage of Latinos and the percentage of Latino citizens in a state make an appreciable difference in terms of the probability of Latinos winning seats. In California, the difference is remarkable. As more Latinos naturalize, register, and vote, it will take fewer Latinos in a district to elect Latino representatives. Nevertheless, the U.S. House and the New York Legislature are the least responsive to the election of Latinos, largely because these legislatures are highly professionalized, do not have term limits, and therefore are not amenable to political newcomers.

Redistricting will take place in 2011, and most state legislatures in the South will have to comply with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments. Republicans are in control of the process in Texas and will design districts to maximize their chances of keeping control of the legislature. In Arizona, an independent redistricting commission will be responsible for drawing the new legislative and congressional districts. The interesting question will be how Latinos fare in the whole process. Preexisting majority Latino districts will have to remain intact in VRA covered states, but new districts can be created to maximize Republican representation. This generally means packing minorities into few districts, but unlike Blacks, Latinos do not monolithically vote Democratic, so the process is much more complex. Unlike blacks, Latinos also vote at much lower rates, which helps explain why Latino representation lags behind the percentage of Latinos in most state populations.

Republicans will attempt to protect their U.S. House incumbents. In Texas this includes newly elected Latino U.S. Reps. Quico Canseco and Bill Flores. Canseco's San Antonio district will be contentious as it was when it was represented by Republican Henry Bonilla before his loss to Ciro Rodriguez. Like Bonilla, Canseco cannot be thought of as a "candidate of choice" of the majority of Latino voters in his district. Usually, Republicans try to pack minorities but in this case, this would only make it more difficult for Canseco to keep his seat. If Republicans increase the number of white voters thereby reducing the number of Hispanics, then they run the risk of violating Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, especially with LULAC v. Perry as precedent in the very same district. This is why this will be the most interesting district to watch in the 2011 cycle. Flores' district might gain some Hispanics but his district only has approximately a 5 percent Latino population compared to Canseco's which has a 55 percent Latino population. Interestingly, both Canseco and Flores did not serve in lower elected offices. Flores ran for the first time in 2010, and Canseco had run for Congress in 2008 but lost the primary. Both men, however, are successful business owners, who were able to fund their campaigns.

Latino representation in state legislatures and Congress are on the increase, and in states and districts with which they have little or no natural advantage. For example, Latinos are increasingly winning in state legislative districts in majority white districts across the South. As Latinos are mainstreamed into American society, including increases in intermarriage with whites, Latino representation will increase above and beyond the majority Latino areas (Casellas 2011). While there are currently two Latino Republican governors (Brian Sandoval in Nevada and Susana Martinez in New Mexico), it is only a matter of time before more states in the Southwest elect Latinos to even more statewide offices.

IV. Latino Public Policies: Education and Immigration

Education consistently ranks as the most important issue facing Latino voters. In the Pew/Kaiser National Survey of Latinos conducted in 2002, Latino voters ranked education as the most important issue when determining for whom to vote. The economy ranked second, albeit a nationwide recession following the terrorist attacks of September 11 of the previous year. Five years later, another poll conducted by Ed in '08 indicated that Latino voters reported that a candidate's position on education was the most important consideration in vote choice. The poll also revealed that the high school dropout rate was the most important problem facing the Latino community in the U.S. These opinions are understandable given what we know about Latino educational attainment. Since the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) was first administered, Latino 4th graders have scored an average of 18 points below white students on the reading test and between 21 and 34 points on the math test. Results for 8th and 12th grade students mirror these patterns (National Center for Education Statistics 2007). Latino students face a significant achievement gap relative to white students (Jasinski 2000; Martinez-Ebers 2000). These disparities extend to other measures. Latino students are significantly more likely than white students to enter kindergarten unprepared to learn, to have to repeat a grade, to be suspended or expelled, and to drop out. They are less likely to start and finish college, and those that do are more likely to pursue an associate's degree rather than a bachelor's degree (Weiss 2004). Many Latinos face the double challenge of low socioeconomic status, which is associated with low performance on educational outcomes, and lack of English fluency, which hinders children's ability to understand their teachers and their parents' ability to navigate the extensive bureaucracy of the American educational system (Solórzano 1995).

In terms of support for bilingual education, most Americans tend to have a positive view, although this depends on question wording. Two-thirds of Anglo Americans professed support of bilingual education in a survey conducted in 1983 (Huddy and Sears 1987). However, what precisely does bilingual education mean? Transitional bilingual education means educating students in a foreign language until they are able to fully assimilate into English dominant classrooms. Maintenance bilingual education means educating students in two or more languages in order to create a truly bilingual adult. The American public has consistently favored the former.

An additional, important predictor of attitudes on bilingual education has to do with the proximity of respondents to Hispanic populations. Much in the same way Key (1960) shows with voters in the South, Anglos who live in areas with larger proportions of Latinos are more likely to oppose bilingual education (Huddy and Sears 1987). This is a variant of the “threat hypothesis” observed with white voters in areas with large African American populations (Giles and Hertz 1994). Racial attitudes about Latinos are also strong predictors of attitudes on bilingual education. For example, feeling thermometers of Latinos often show significant negative affect. In 1983, Huddy and Sears (1987) found that Latinos were “among the least liked” groups (128). As such, programs perceived by voters to benefit a minority group, such as bilingual education, are often viewed with suspicion, if not outright disdain. Huddy and Sears (1987) note that “support for bilingual education is likely to erode over time” as voters become more informed over time regarding its various permutations. Has this borne itself out?

As John Kingdon (1984) demonstrates, members of Congress should be most responsive to their constituents on issues of high salience or importance. In what Wirt and Mitchell (1982) term “issue emergence,” action is only taken by politicians if it is relatively clear what

constituencies want. In the case of education, every constituency wants “better” education, but precisely how to achieve this has been the subject of endless debate. With issues of low salience or importance, members of Congress traditionally have more discretion to vote their consciences without fear of voter retribution.

The “Promise” of No Child Left Behind for Latino Children

In 2000, President Bush appealed to the Latino vote by emphasizing his record on educational policy as governor of Texas, and proposing the No Child Left Behind Bill, which he argued would help close the achievement gap. While NCLB was passed in 2001 with bipartisan support, most Latino organizations, including the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, opposed the legislation for a variety of reasons, including the “discriminatory and burdensome requirement in Title I and Title III for parental consent for ESL instruction, a three year limit on the services that LEP children could receive for assistance in learning English and keeping up with. . . math and reading; and consolidation and/or elimination of numerous programs that provide resources for schools” (NHLA Brief 2002). Since that time, NCLB has been controversial, with major Latino figures such as New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson calling for its complete elimination. Additionally, the Latino population in many states has mobilized in opposition to the high stakes testing requirements of NCLB, which arguably disadvantage students who do not test well.

NCLB has given the federal government its most extensive role in K-12 public education in the country’s history. It demands states test students in reading and mathematics annually in grades 3-8, and in science, once in elementary, middle, and high school. States must also produce annual report cards with students’ academic achievements and multiple other indicators

of the quality of each school district, with districts responsible for providing the same data for each school. States must ensure that all students reach proficiency on state tests by 2013-14 and meet benchmarks for “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), which the federal government sets to ensure they reach this goal. Finally, states are expected to ensure every teacher is “highly qualified,” which NCLB defines as state certification and demonstrable proficiency in both pedagogy and their subject area.

President Obama has promised to keep many of the principles of *No Child Left Behind* when he reauthorizes the bill in 2011. His Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has spearheaded a new program called Race to the Top, which involves a competition by states for federal money. It remains to be seen the extent to which these new policies will positively impact the Latino community.

Immigration Policy, 1986-present

The last major piece of immigration reform affecting Latinos was in 1986. In that year, President Reagan signed an amnesty provision granting a path to citizenship for nearly 2.7 million undocumented immigrants. This legislation dramatically increased the pool of potential Latino citizens, which some argue greatly assisted President Clinton ten years later in his re-election bid. The reform also established more fixed annual admission ceilings, increased funding for the Border Patrol, and called for the sanctioning of employers who knowingly employed undocumented immigrants. While the federal government turned a blind eye to sanctions in the 1990s and 2000s, only recently has President Obama actively pursued workplace raids and other crackdowns on employers who violate the law. While the initial act in 1986 required proof of legal status for employment, many immigrants have used fake documents and

other ways to circumvent this rule. As a result, the federal government uses a new system called “E-verify” which seeks to make it easier for employers to check the genuineness of documents and social security numbers.

In 2006, Congress and the President attempted to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill. However, opponents on the right and the left defeated the measure. Many on the far right, such as Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-CO) refused to support any bill that proposed amnesty for undocumented immigrants. Despite the President’s advocacy of the bill, he could not convince some of his Republican colleagues to support a comprehensive approach. Efforts were made to instead only focus on border security and fence building. In 2006, Congress did pass the Secure Fence Act which authorized the construction of a border fence along the Arizona and California border.

With looming budget deficits, new wars in the Middle East, and unemployment at all time highs, President Obama has little incentive or time to address comprehensive immigration reform any time soon. At the same time, the Obama Administration has conducted an unprecedented number of workplace raids leading to more deportations than his predecessor. In the short term, illegal immigration from Mexico has been reduced largely because of the struggling economy in the United States. Estimates of the undocumented population in the United States continue to grow with the latest figures showing approximately 11 million undocumented people. An editorial in *La Opinion*, a Spanish language newspaper, recently suggested that President Obama needs to address immigration reform this term, or else Latino voters should look elsewhere in 2012. The larger question remains, however, whether the alternative would be any better.

V. *Conclusion*

The Latino population has recently soared to just over 50 million in the United States. At just over 16 percent of the population and growing, the Latino population is poised to influence American society in many ways. Its political influence, however, has traditionally lagged behind its numbers, and this will no doubt continue. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that the growing demographic reality will ultimately lead to the full incorporation of Latinos in American politics. For American politics is Latino politics. We cannot understand American politics without understanding the role of the largest minority group in the country and the definitive deciders in such key battleground states as Florida and New Mexico.

Latino representation in the United States can only go up from now. The question is whether Latinos will have the same quality of representation as other groups. In many areas, the fear is that growing Latino influence in electoral politics will trigger resentment and backlash, thus exacerbating the full inclusion of Latinos in American society. We are hopeful that such backlash will be isolated, marginalized, and repudiated, for Latino immigrants, like the Irish, Italian, and other ethnic groups preceding them in America, have only enriched American society in numerous ways.

Since Latinos care more about education than any other issue, it is imperative that policymakers continue to devise policies which will make America more competitive in the future. In 1983, the Nation at Risk report warned that America was lagging behind the world in terms of academic preparation. Since Latinos are a youthful population, it is all the more pressing that more is done to close the achievement gap and reduce the high school dropout rate. This is not merely a Latino problem. This is a problem which has already affected American

competitiveness in the world and will continue to put America at the risk of falling behind other major economies. We cannot wait and let the problem worsen. Our future literally depends on it.

Likewise, with immigration policy, it is simply unacceptable that more than 11 million people are living in the shadows and not able to live the American dream as they desire.

Comprehensive immigration reform must be addressed sooner or later. In the meantime, more deportations, family breakups, and other pathologies will continue unless Washington steps in with the courage to address a problem that is spiraling out of control.

Table I. Top Six Latino Destination States

State	Total	Percent Latino
California	13,682,187	37.0
Texas	9,151,255	36.9
Florida	3,987,190	21.5
New York	3,274,572	16.8
Arizona	2,031,990	30.8
Illinois	1,969,336	15.3

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of 2000 Census IPUMS and 2009 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS)

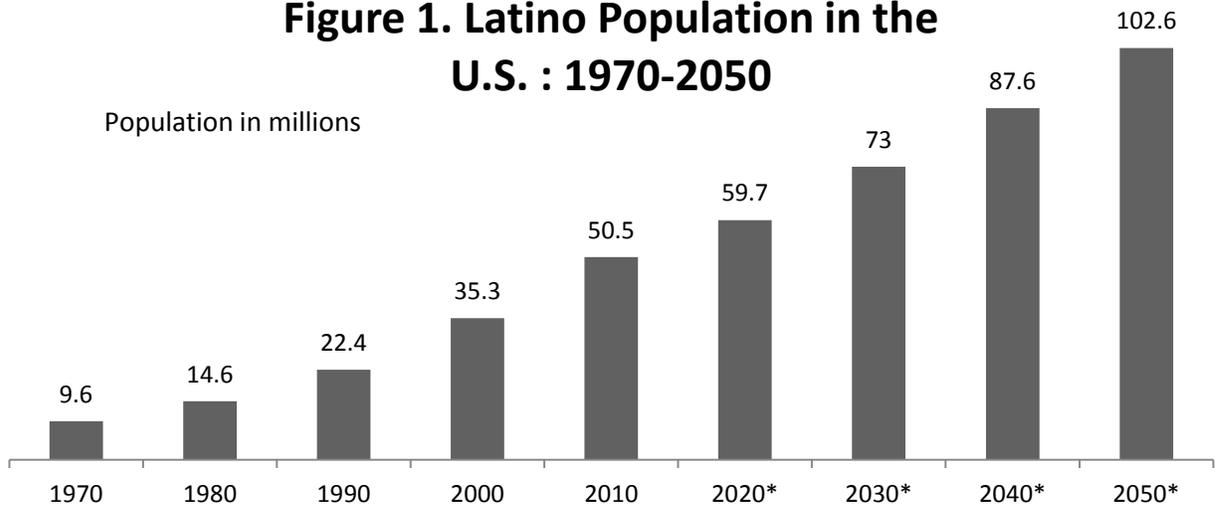
Table II. Top Six Latino Growth Rate States

State	2009 Total	Percent Growth Rate
South Carolina	203,939	115.5
Arkansas	171,705	101.3
Kentucky	112,997	98.5
Minnesota	223,251	91.3
North Carolina	717,234	90.2
Georgia	815,688	87.8

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of 2000 Census IPUMS and 2009 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS)

Figure 1. Latino Population in the U.S. : 1970-2050

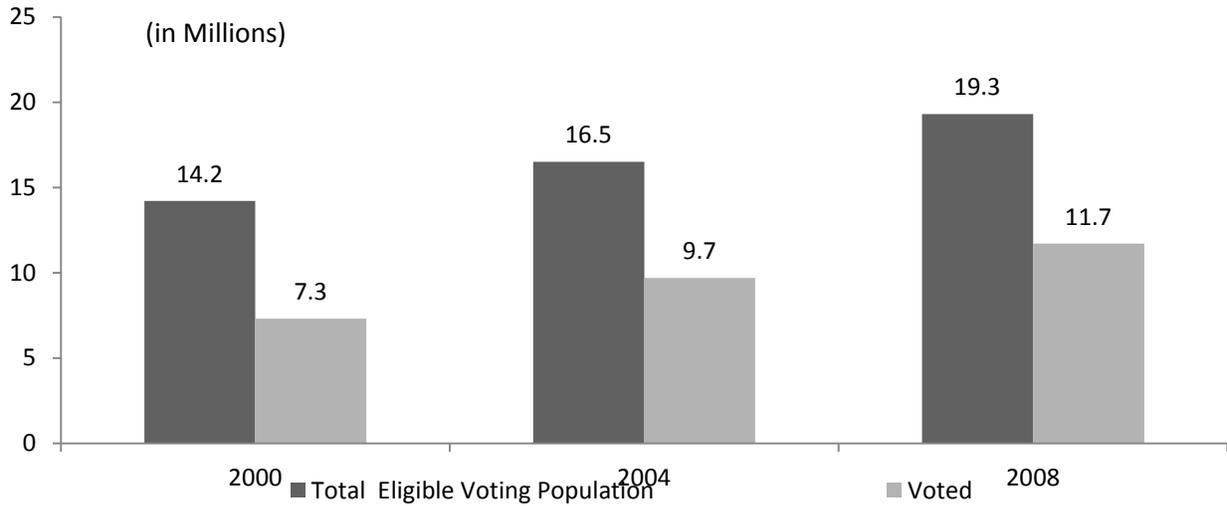
Population in millions



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; * Population Projections

Figure 2. Growing Latino Electorate

(in Millions)



Source: U.S. American Community Survey (2004, 2006, 2008)

Figure 3. Eligible Latinos Reaching Voting Age by Election Cycle

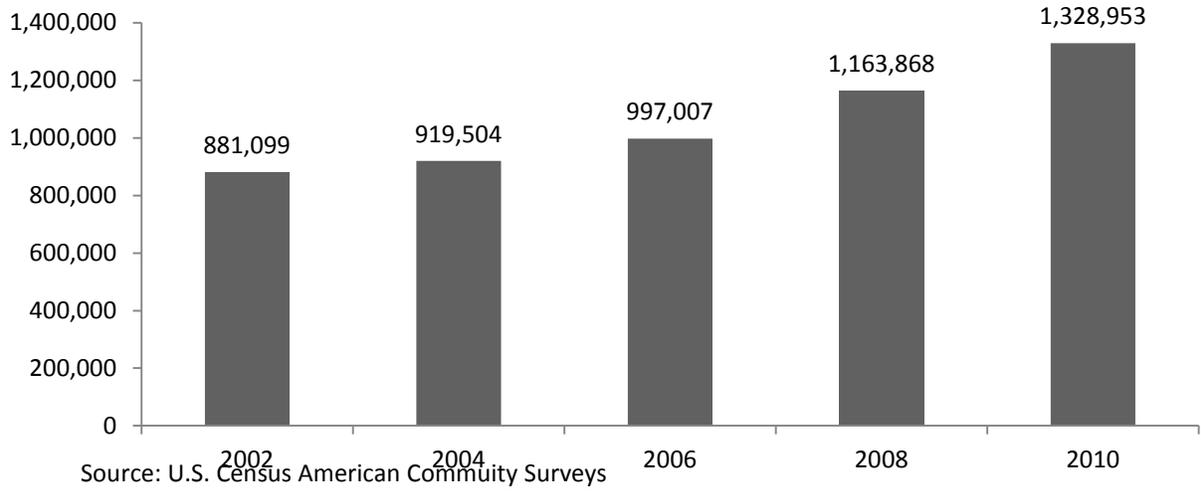


Figure 4. When asked among registered Latinos: Which party do you think has more concern for Hispanics/Latinos, the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, or no difference?

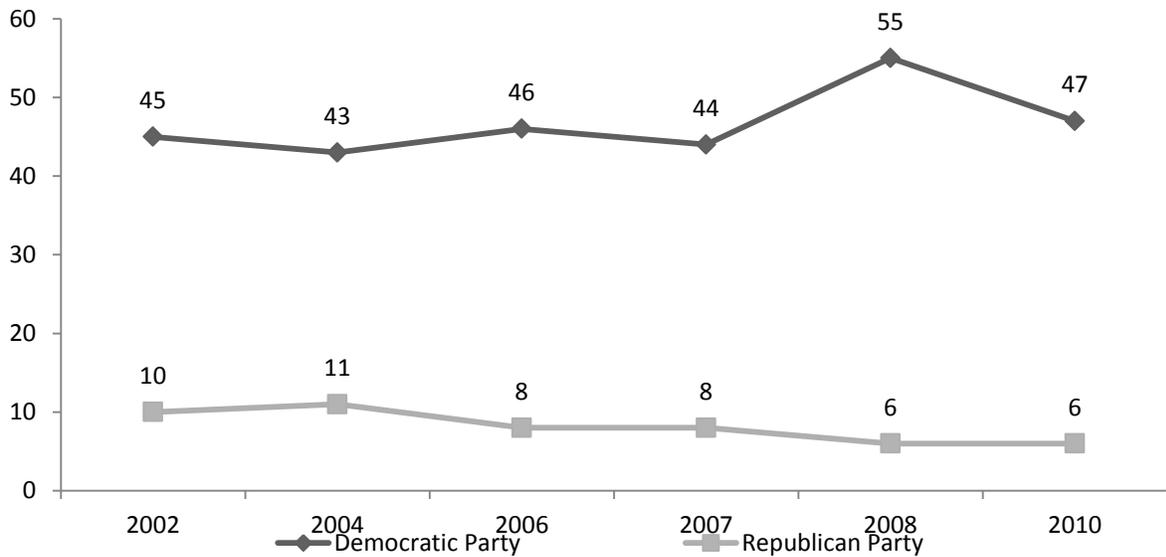
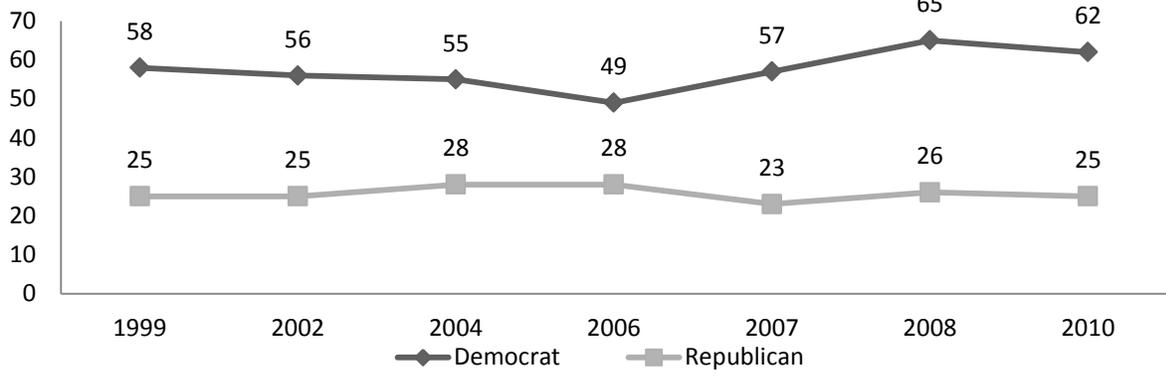


Figure 5. Party Affiliation among Latino Registered Voter (by percent)



Source: Pew Hispanic Center, National Survey of Latinos 1999-2010

Table 3: Latino Representatives in the U.S. Congress ranked in descending order of Latino population (2011)

Name	District	% Latino	% Black	Party
Rubén Hinojosa	15-Texas	78	2	Democrat
Henry Cuellar	28-Texas	78	1	Democrat
Silvestre Reyes	16-Texas	78	3	Democrat
Lucille Roybal-Allard	34-California	77	4	Democrat
Luis V.Gutiérrez	4-Illinois	75	4	Democrat
Grace Napolitano	38-California	71	4	Democrat
Mario Díaz –Balart	21-Florida	70	7	Republican
Xavier Becerra	31-California	70	4	Democrat
Charles González	20-Texas	67	7	Democrat
Loretta Sánchez	47-California	65	2	Democrat
Francisco Canseco	23-Texas	65	3	Republican
José Serrano	16-New York	63	36	Democrat
Ed Pastor	2-Arizona	63	5	Democrat
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen	18-Florida	63	6	Republican
David Rivera	25-Florida	62	10	Republican
Linda Sánchez	39-California	61	6	Democrat
Joe Baca	43-California	58	3	Democrat
Raúl Grijalva	7-Arizona	51	3	Democrat
Nydia Velásquez	12-New York	49	9	Democrat
Albio Sires	13-New Jersey	48	11	Democrat
Ben Lujan	3-New Mexico	36	1	Democrat
Marco Rubio	Sen-Florida	22	16	Republican
Bob Menendez	Sen-New Jersey	17	15	Democrat
Bill Flores	17-Texas	15	10	Republican
Raul Labrador	1-Idaho	7	<1	Republican
Jaime Herrera Buetler	3-Washington	5	1	Republican

Source: National Journal's *Almanac of American Politics*, 2011

Table 4: Probability of a Latino Being Elected to eight Legislatures, 2003-2004

Percent Latino	Probability						
	CA	AZ	NJ	NM	TX	USH	NY
Citizen							
80 percent	99	98	88	97	97	98	36
60 percent	99	95	80	83	76	83	21
50 percent	95	89	72	65	53	40	14
40 percent	77	69	58	42	29	7	9
20 percent	11	5	17	9	3	.4	3

Source: Estimates derived from probit results with all other variables set at their means using CLARIFY®, Casellas (2011)

Table 5: Probability of a Latino Being Elected to eight Legislatures, 2003-2004

Percent Latino	Probability							
	FL	NM	CA	NJ	AZ	TX	NY	USH
80 percent	100	98	95	89	96	87	67	99
60 percent	99	79	71	65	71	52	40	74
50 percent	99	57	50	48	47	31	28	27
40 percent	94	34	30	32	25	15	17	3
20 percent	8	5	5	9	3	2	5	<1

Source: Estimates derived from probit results using all Latinos in legislative districts with all other variables set at their means using CLARIFY®, Casellas (2011)

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