

# **Mobilizing the Vote: Latinos and Immigrants in the 2002 Midterm Election**

# Acknowledgements

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# I Introduction

The recent public attention paid to the Latino\* vote, and to the influence of immigrants on American democracy, is difficult to miss. In the days leading up to the November 2002 election, press coverage in states as diverse as Massachusetts and Arizona, as well as by national commentators, suggested that the Latino vote was likely to be critical to the results of this close election.<sup>1</sup>

In July 2002 the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) released a study at its Annual Conference, *Mobilizing the Latino Vote: Tapping the Power of the Hispanic Electorate*, which examined this phenomenon. The study shows that there is more to the story than simple growth in this segment of the electorate. While the size and scope of the Latino vote is undoubtedly increasing, it also appears that this expansion has yet to translate into a focus by candidates or political parties on policy issues of concern to Latinos. Furthermore, there is a significant gap between the size of the potential Latino electorate and the number of Latinos who actually vote. Although low participation has sometimes been attributed to the significant segment of the immigrant, noncitizen population that is Latino, the majority of Latinos are native-born and speak English as their first language. This suggests that there is a great deal more that policy-makers, aspirants to public office, and the Latino community itself can do to maximize the contributions that Hispanic voters make to the vitality of American democracy.

In order for this to occur, NCLR believes that more information is needed on Latino voters and voting patterns. The November 2002 midterm election provides a fresh opportunity to go beyond NCLR's July 2002 study and examine three supplementary sets of information, which are incorporated into this updated report.

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\* The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer collectively to Central and South Americans, Cubans, Dominicans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and others of Spanish and Latin American descent. Hispanics may be of any race.

The 2002 midterm election witnessed an increasing number of nonpartisan civic education and voter mobilization efforts focused on immigrant and Latino voters throughout the country. Community-based and other organizations engaged in a variety of activities, ranging from research and polling to shed greater understanding on the issues and voting patterns of these communities, to voter registration and Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaigns aimed at increasing voter participation and strengthening the democratic process. The following section is an illustration of some of those efforts.

**LOCATION:** Chicago Suburbs, Illinois

**POPULATION:** Immigrants

**ORGANIZATION:** Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR)

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The mission of ICIRR, an alliance of more than 90 public and private organizations, is to promote the full and equal participation of immigrants and refugees in Illinois' civic, cultural, social, and political life. To fill the information void with respect to the state's immigrant population, in October 2002, ICIRR issued *The Changing Face of Illinois*, a report documenting the growth of foreign-born voters in suburbs around Chicago and their potential impact in state and federal elections.

This year, ICIRR began training immigrant organizations on voter mobilization strategies, ranging from door-to-door canvassing and phone banking, to working with the media. In partnership with the Asian American Institute, the Council of Islamic Organizations of Metropolitan Chicago, Common Cause of Illinois, the Latino Caucus of United Power for Action and Justice, and the United Neighborhood Organization, ICIRR engaged in a nonpartisan voter education campaign, providing education materials and sample ballots, and using

sample voting machines to familiarize members of the community with the mechanics of the voting process. In its work, the Coalition underscored the need for all participants in the election year effort to educate the community about the eligibility requirements for voter registration and participation.

The campaign reached, among other areas, the suburbs of Aurora, Elgin, Des Plaines, and Kane County. In addition to voter education forums, members of the different organizations went door to door asking people for a commitment to vote and placed calls on Election Day. While this nonpartisan effort may have paled in comparison to the famous Illinois partisan party machines - some of which have decidedly immigrant and ethnic components - the Illinois Coalition and its partners are filling a definite need, as partisan campaigns have tended to focus on already registered, and usually high propensity, voters. One organizer recalled that on trips through certain neighborhoods, only one out of ten people was a registered voter. ICIRR sees this year's effort as an initial step to increasing the number of naturalized immigrants who register and go to the polls.

"Immigrants are the new 'soccer moms' of Illinois politics," said Joshua Hoyt, executive director of ICIRR. "They are the key swing vote in battleground districts that will determine which political party controls the Illinois House and Senate for the next ten years."

**LOCATION:** Houston, Texas

**POPULATION:** Immigrants

**ORGANIZATION:** Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)

**Contact:** Glenda Kizzee, txacornhoro@acorn.org

ACORN, the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, went door to door in Houston in targeted apartment buildings, housing developments, high schools, and "high-volume traffic areas" with high concentrations of

First, this update includes a focus on the Latino electorate as well as on immigrant voters who may or may not be Hispanic, but whose demographic characteristics have much in common with Latinos in terms of population growth and distribution, and the proportion who participate in elections.<sup>2</sup> Second, this study updates survey data with a variety of new, more recent sources, and highlights a number of community-based efforts aimed at increasing the participation of this segment of the electorate. Finally, this study includes a preliminary assessment of November 2002 election results.

# Latino and Immigrant Voters

As media sources and political candidates have noted, there are clear trends in the Latino and immigrant electorates, the most significant of which is population growth. The greatest shifts are taking place in communities that have not been traditionally associated with Latinos or immigrants, in states such as North Carolina, Nevada, and Arkansas. However, even with major increases in the size of the Latino population throughout the U.S., there is a substantial gap between the potential Latino and immigrant electorate and the number of eligible adults who actually vote. While the results of key elections may hinge on Latino and immigrant voters, the voting power of these constituencies is not what it could be.

## The Latino Electorate

The 2000 Census revealed that Hispanics are now the largest ethnic minority in the United States; 35.3 million Americans - one in eight - are Hispanic.\* While the states with the largest Latino populations all experienced significant growth from 1990 to 2000, a total of 23 states experienced dramatic, triple-digit increases in their Hispanic populations during the same period (see Figure 1 for the top ten states by Latino percentage growth and total population size). Because many of these areas view this demographic shift as a “new” phenomenon, its impact on the larger community, and on the electorate, has commanded attention. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of states in which Latinos represented 5% or more of the total number of voting-age citizens increased from 15 to 23.

A summary of data from the most recent elections shows that:<sup>3</sup>

### 1996

- ▶ U.S.-born and naturalized Latino citizens had together achieved a record 28% increase in voter registrants over 1992. Of the 6.6 million registered Latino voters, 75%, or almost five million, cast ballots in the November 1996 presidential election.<sup>4</sup>

### 1998

- ▶ In the 1998 midterm election, Census data showed that 59% of Latino registered voters turned out at the polls, compared with 42% of all registered voters.

immigrants to register voters and take them to the polls. They educated the community about voting and “early voting,” distributed the “Texas Voters’ Bill of Rights,” and provided information on ex-offenders’ voting rights in Texas. They targeted Latino, Asian, and African immigrants, as well as young voters (19-25 years of age) and ex-offenders because of their traditionally low voter participation levels. As Election Day approached, ACORN set up phone banks, door-to-door campaigns, and “count-on-me” commitments from new voters stating that they would go to the polls.

This is the third election cycle in which ACORN has targeted immigrant communities with voter education and mobilization activities in Houston (the first targeting ex-offenders and the second targeting youth). According to Glenda Kizsee, ACORN’s head organizer in Houston, “Success is measured by the number of new registrations, targeted precinct voter turnout, and civic participation of members in the target communities.” From August to October 2002, ACORN registered 16,728 voters. The greatest success was ACORN’s first Youth Civic Participation Conference attended by over 800 high school and college students, with recruitment targeting high school seniors enrolled in government or economics in six school districts. Over the years, ACORN has established close relations with the Harris County Voter Services Office to ensure that the voters they register are indeed eligible by law to vote.

Kizsee says the main lesson from their work in 2002 and in previous years is that “door-to-door works...you knock on enough doors and people will show up to vote.”

Nationally, ACORN has over 120,000 member families organized into 600 neighborhood chapters in 45 cities.

\* This does not include the 3.8 million residents of Puerto Rico.



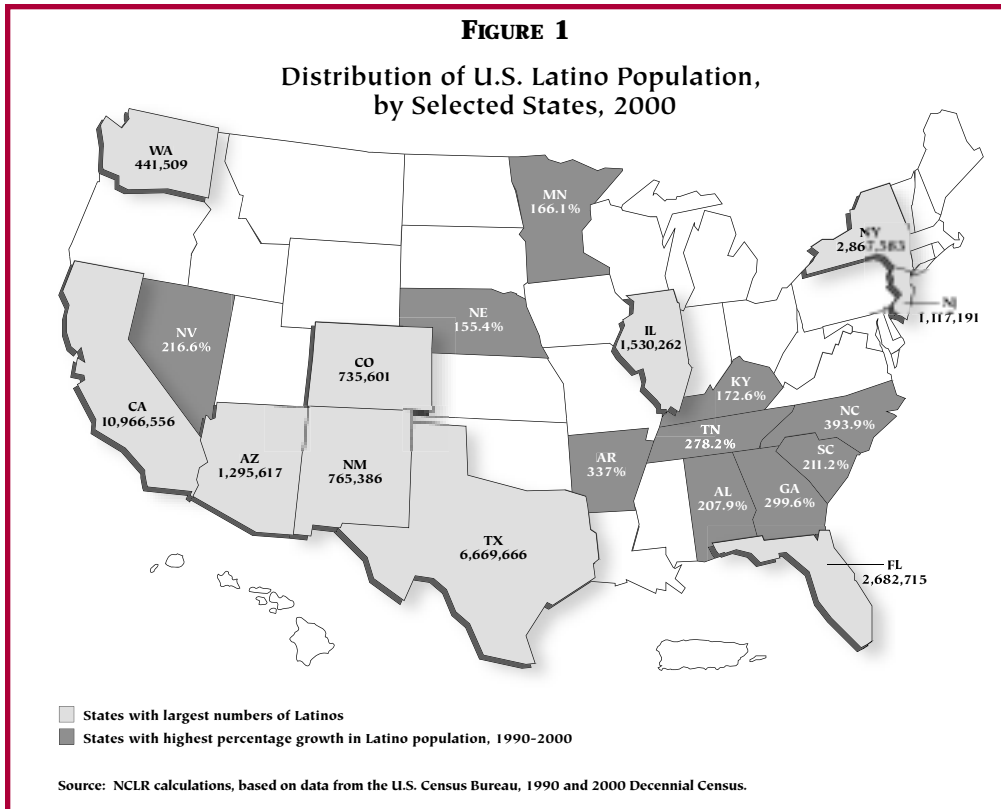
**LOCATION:** New York City, New York  
**POPULATION:** Immigrants  
**ORGANIZATION:** New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)

**Contact:** Suman Raghunathan,  
sraghunathan@thenyic.org

In October 2002, NYIC celebrated the registration of their 200,000th voter, and the third year of a multifaceted campaign dedicated to increasing civic participation among New York's immigrant communities. NYIC is an umbrella policy and advocacy organization of more than 150 groups representative of New York's diversity. The Coalition's voter registration project represents the largest of its kind in the state, and the largest multiethnic, nonpartisan project in the country.

Through its year-round Immigrant Voter Education and Mobilization Initiative, NYIC and its coalition partners organized over 50 voter education events, where participants discussed voting rights and the electoral process as well as issues of concern to immigrant communities. NYIC distributed voter education materials including a multilingual "Know your Rights as a New Citizen Voter" palm card, which includes information in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, and Haitian Creole; and short videos that walk new voters through the voting process and the use of voting machines. NYIC also worked with its partners and the Board of Elections to recruit over 400 bilingual poll workers who could provide language assistance, thereby reducing potential incidents of voter disenfranchisement.

On Election Day 2000, NYIC partnered with Barnard College Professor Lori Minnite to conduct the "New Americans Exit Poll." This first-of-its-kind survey found that, of New York City's 450,000 first-time voters, 300,000 were first-generation immigrant, and provided information on the voting preferences and attitudes of over 1,000 immigrant voters. A second "New Americans Exit Poll" was conducted on



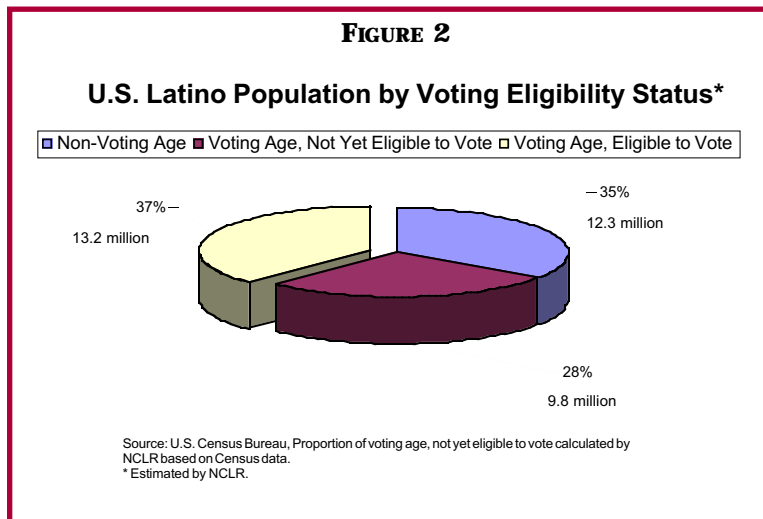
## 2000

- ▶ A close election combined with unprecedented election-related spending led to the highest voter turnout, overall, in a generation. Over 5.9 million Latinos participated in the presidential election in 2000.
- ▶ Yet, compared with 62% for Whites and 57% for Blacks, only 45% of Latino voting-age citizens (VACs) voted in the November 2000 election. Latino registered voters fared slightly better - close to 79% of Latino registered voters (RVs) voted in 2000, compared with 86% and 84%, respectively, of White and Black registered voters.

Based on population growth alone, if current patterns of naturalization, voter registration, and voter participation among Latinos continue, NCLR projects that the national Latino vote is likely to increase from 5.93 million in 2000 to about 7.85 million in 2004, a growth rate of nearly one-third.<sup>5</sup> However this substantial growth

masks a more complicated set of dynamics within the Latino community; that is, the number of potential voters is substantially larger than the number who actually turn out at the polls. Indeed, the majority of Latino adults are not voters, either because they lack citizenship status, or because they are not yet registered.

Of the nation's 35.3 million Latinos, 65%, or 23 million, are adults of voting age. However, of these, only 13.2 million, or 57%, are voting-age U.S. citizens (VACs), and therefore eligible to vote,<sup>6</sup> as shown in Figure 2. Among Latino citizens of voting age, 7.5 million (57%) are registered and 5.9 million (45%) turned out to vote in the 2000 election.<sup>7</sup> Among the 18- to 24-year-old population, Latinos also have the lowest rates of voter registration and participation, when compared with their African American and White counterparts. And almost one-fifth of Latino adults of voting age are in this age bracket (4.2 million). The youthfulness of the Latino population, combined with substantial numbers of immigrants who have not yet naturalized,<sup>\*</sup> are major factors that limit the potential of the electorate.



\* According to a recent poll by the Pew Hispanic Center, fully one-third of the Hispanic population either intends to seek or is in the process of applying for citizenship.

Election Day 2002; full analysis of the poll will be made available in February 2003.

**LOCATION: Providence, Rhode Island**

**POPULATION: Latinos**

**ORGANIZATION: Project Vote**

**Contact:** Dave Lagstein, Project Director,  
(401) 374-3338.

Project Vote's Providence coalition included the Rhode Island Political Action Committee (RIPAC), Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Locals 217 and 1199, PrYSM (an Asian youth organization), and Rhode Island ACORN. In registering 4,000 new voters, Project Vote and its partners knocked on 6,000 doors twice over the final three weeks prior to the election, and on Election Day called every voter five times and knocked on every door three times. The group targeted 12 precincts on the South Side of Providence, with a particular focus on Latino neighborhoods, given that this was the first year that Project Vote was active in the Latino community in Providence. In 1998 in the same 12 targeted precincts, the turnout total was 3,365. In 2002, the turnout in this area was 4,828, an astounding 42% increase. All volunteers were scrupulously trained to confirm a person's citizenship status before registering new voters.

Turnout in the South Side precincts is thought by some to have had an impact on the election outcome. Political experts in Providence credit the increased Latino turnout with victories for the following three candidates: David Cicilline in the Providence mayoral race; Juan Pichardo, the first Latino State Senator in Rhode Island; and Miguel Luna, the first person of color to represent Ward 9 on the Providence City Council.

ACORN member Xiomara Santana said, "I never thought of myself as political. This summer and fall that changed. We registered tons of people to vote, and made sure they all voted on Election Day. Now I know that our community can make a difference."

**LOCATION:** Multistate Effort

**POPULATION:** Arab Americans

**ORGANIZATION:** Arab American  
Institute (AAI)

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Jenny Salan, [jsalan@aaiusa.org](mailto:jsalan@aaiusa.org)

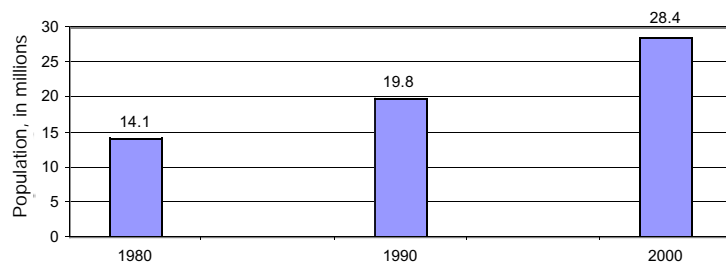
A 2000 Zogby International poll found that 88.5% of Arab Americans are registered voters and turnout among this group is consistently above average. To capitalize on these exemplary registration and turnout numbers, AAI sponsored a series of Civic Education Workshops and Candidates' Nights. Seasoned voters in seven states attended the forums, where 100 top-ticket candidates from all political parties outlined their platforms and encouraged Arab Americans to remain active in the political process. AAI also launched targeted GOTV campaigns in California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Texas. These campaigns featured a variety of methods to create public awareness and energize potential voters, from public service announcements combining Arab and English colloquialisms, to phone banking and door-to-door canvassing. In these efforts, AAI reached over 250,000 voters, including 50,000 who received automated GOTV encouragement calls, 12,300 who received personal phone calls, and 12,000 who received promotional mailings from AAI.

AAI's experience in staging campaign forums and GOTV events traces back to 1986, when the organization first mobilized Arab American voters in five states around local and national campaigns. Since then, the organization's ability to attract prominent candidates has grown exponentially, culminating in the 2000 election in which four presidential campaigns participated in AAI forums and both major political parties actively courted Arab American support. After the terrorist attacks of September 11 and a series of policy changes that

## The Immigrant Electorate

While a substantial proportion (40%) of the Latino population is foreign-born, demographic trends among the larger immigrant population reflect a rich tapestry of nationalities and ethnicities, which is also increasingly visible in the national electorate. There are both similarities and differences in the dramatic demographic changes occurring in the foreign-born population and among Latinos. However, while a great deal of public attention is focused on Latino population growth, there is a tendency to view Latinos as a proxy for immigrants. This perception is a disservice to the broad range of constituencies represented within immigrant communities and to the generations of Latinos who are native-born, and tends to mask major differences. For example, turnout among foreign-born voters, as a whole, is much greater than it is for the Latino electorate, and the Latino population, overall, is much younger than the total immigrant population.

**FIGURE 3**  
**U.S. Foreign-Born Population Growth, 1980-2000**

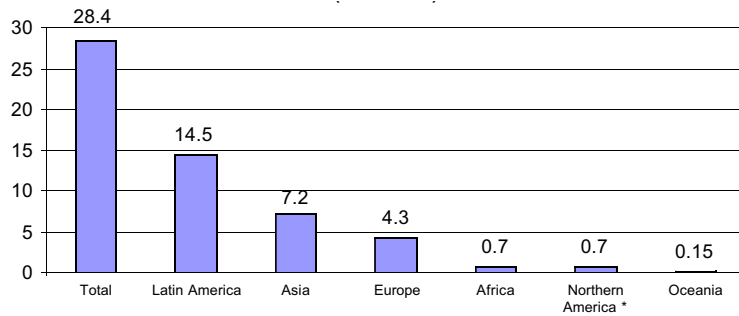


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the U.S.:2000*

The foreign-born population has grown substantially in recent decades; indeed, in the period between 1980 and 2000, the number of immigrants in the U.S. doubled, as illustrated in Figure 3. Among the foreign-born population, the largest groups are of Latino and Asian origin. In 2000, 51% of the foreign-born were Latino, 25.5% were Asian, and 15.5% were European,<sup>8</sup> with each group having great diversity within its ranks (see Figure 4). While immigration is generally associated with “port of entry



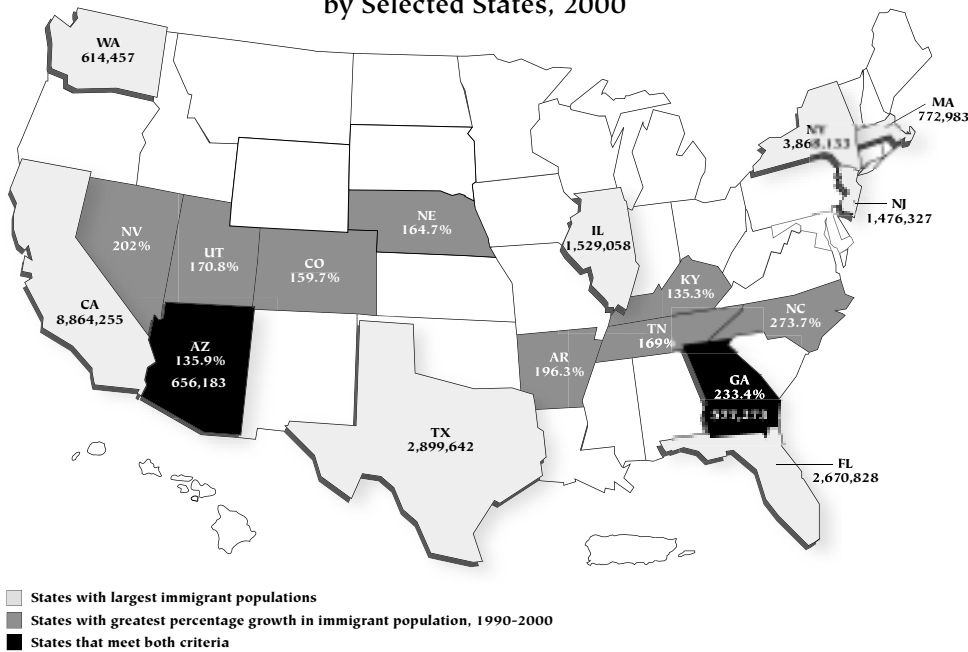
**FIGURE 4  
Composition of U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 2000  
(in millions)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *March 2000 Current Population Survey*  
\* Includes Canada, Bermuda, Greenland, and two islands governed by France, St. Pierre, and Miquelon.

communities,” such as Los Angeles, Miami, and New York, Census data reveal that the ten states that experienced the largest percentage growth in foreign-born residents are, starting from the highest, North Carolina, Georgia, Nevada, Arkansas, Utah, Tennessee, Nebraska, Colorado, Arizona, and Kentucky,<sup>9</sup> as shown in Figure 5.

**FIGURE 5  
Distribution of U.S. Immigrant Population,  
by Selected States, 2000**



Source: Calculations by the Migration Policy Institute, based on U.S. Census Bureau; Demographic Profile: 1990 and 2000 Comparison Tables.

have targeted the Arab American community since then, Arab American political participation was expected to remain strong in 2002, or even exceed previous precedent. “Despite the efforts by a few candidates who engaged in ‘Arab-baiting,’ our community remains true to American democracy and will continue to fight for our place at the table of American politics. On Election Day, Arab Americans will make themselves heard at the voting booth,” said AAI Managing Director Jean AbiNader.

**LOCATION: Multistate Effort**

**POPULATION: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders**

**ORGANIZATION: Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA)**

**Contact:** Jin Sook Lee, National Executive Director, (202) 974-8051.

APALA, the largest national organization of Asian Pacific American union members, launched APALA Vote 2002, a national, nonpartisan voter mobilization project for the 2002 midterm election. Aimed at increasing voter turnout among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, APALA Vote 2002 held voter registration, voter education, and get-out-the-vote drives in the six states with the largest concentrations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

In its October 16, 2002 press release, Gloria T. Caoile, Chair of APALA’s Political Action and Mobilization Committee, stated, “APALA is proud to sponsor a nonpartisan voter mobilization project in Las Vegas, New Jersey, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. We want to see large numbers of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders turn out to vote in this coming election. Voting is essential to keeping democracy alive, and APALA is committed to empowering the Asian American and Pacific Islander community so that we can have an impact on the electoral process.”

In Minneapolis and Las Vegas alone, APALA Vote

2002 reached over 20,000 registered voters by telephone. Similarly, over 30,000 GOTV flyers were mailed or distributed to registered Asian Pacific American voters.

In Minneapolis and St. Paul, APALA Vote 2002 provided volunteers who drove over 100 eligible voters to the polls, and also acted as interpreters at sites. With an increased focus on the growing Hmong population in Minnesota, APALA Vote 2002 placed an advertisement in a key Hmong newspaper and provided interpreters at ten polling sites.

This is the fourth election cycle in which APALA, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), has targeted Asian American and Pacific Islander communities with voter mobilization activities. Jin Sook Lee, National Executive Director of APALA, says that its main lesson from previous years is to "focus on cities with large concentrations of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders."

Ms. Lee reflects, "We successfully did outreach to a large number of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and clearly sent the message that they can and do vote."

Looking ahead to 2004, Ms. Lee plans to launch voter and political education programs much earlier, and to continue building the grassroots effort.

**LOCATION: Multistate Effort**

**POPULATION: South Asian Americans**

**ORGANIZATION: Project IMPACT for South Asian Americans**

**Contact:** Kavita Kapur, [kavita@project-impact.org](mailto:kavita@project-impact.org);  
[information@project-impact.org](mailto:information@project-impact.org)

Project IMPACT for South Asian Americans, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to increase civic education within its community. Project IMPACT launched voter registration and education drives throughout the U.S., targeting communities with high South Asian populations,

Notably, the immigrant electorate is growing at a rate far faster than the general U.S. voter population. In the four years between the elections of 1996 and 2000, the number of registered foreign-born voters grew 20% compared with 1.5% for all persons.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the number of naturalized persons of voting age increased by 30% from 1996 to 2000, compared with a growth of 3.6% among the general citizen population.<sup>11</sup>

Even with dramatic immigrant population growth, unless immigrants become citizens, their impact will not be felt at the voting booth. Data suggest, however, that once immigrants become U.S. citizens, they are more likely than other Americans to vote. Nationally, 37% of the total foreign-born population are naturalized U.S. citizens.<sup>12</sup> Once naturalized, 58% of the voting-age population registered to vote, and, of these, turnout was quite high in 2000; 87% of foreign-born registered voters showed up at the polls, a slightly higher proportion than that of White or Black voters (86% and 84%, respectively), and substantially higher than the turnout of Latino registered voters for the same election (79%).\*

Nationwide, there are 17.7 million foreign-born persons who are not U.S. citizens.<sup>13</sup> NCLR estimates that five to six million of these are eligible to naturalize because they have been legal permanent residents in the U.S. for at least five years. In 2002, there was a 51% increase in applications for naturalization over the same period of time for 2001.<sup>14</sup> Currently, over 700,000 applications are in the naturalization pipeline,<sup>15</sup> which is plagued with backlogs and bureaucratic impediments. If immigrants who are currently in the naturalization pipeline, as well as an additional one-fourth of those already eligible for citizenship, were to naturalize by 2004, the immigrant voting-age population would increase by nearly 20%. At current rates of voter registration and turnout, this would mean roughly one million new immigrant voters in 2004.<sup>16</sup>

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\* Figures for White, Black, and Latino voters also include the foreign-born.

## **Analysis of Recent Polling Data**

In the months leading up to the 2002 election, several polls have been conducted on Latinos as a whole, as well as on Latino voters. These polls provide important insights into issues of major concern, and perhaps clues regarding factors that motivate Latinos to participate - or not participate - in the electoral process. Notably, while there is a wealth of new polling data focused on Hispanic Americans, some of which distinguishes between native-and foreign-born Latinos, no similar data exist on the total foreign-born population. NCLR believes that this reflects a significant gap in the information available about important new segments of the electorate; it is a mistake to assume that the opinions of Latinos, even those who are foreign-born, reflect the opinions of all immigrants.

The following are among the trends related to Latinos that have been identified or confirmed by a number of recent polls:<sup>\*</sup>

- ▶ Latinos who declare an affiliation with a political party are most likely to be Democrats.** A number of different polls conclude that among Latinos who are registered voters, Democrats have a 2:1 advantage compared to Republicans.<sup>17</sup> This trend appears to be strongest among already registered and foreign-born Hispanics. The Pew Hispanic Center poll notes that among young registered Latinos, party preference is much weaker; among those who are ages 19 to 29, 34% say they are Democrats, 21% identify as Republican, and 26% say they are Independent.<sup>18</sup> This is particularly noteworthy because more than one-third of the Latino population in the U.S. is under 18; as this portion of the community reaches voting age, party affiliation patterns could shift.
- ▶ Latino voting patterns suggest that choices are made based on candidate performance, rather than on party affiliation.** Although these polls show a party affiliation advantage for Democrats, they also note that Republican President George W. Bush's approval ratings are high among Latinos. In

among them Boston, New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Dallas.

Project IMPACT is also the national parent organization for "Mass Desi Vote," a Massachusetts-based initiative focused on younger South Asians. Mass Desi Vote and Director Toby Chaudhuri were featured in a November 2, 2002 article in *The Boston Globe* entitled, "South Asians work to make voices heard," which reported that "During the past 10 weeks, a team of volunteers with Mass Desi Vote has called registered voters with Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Burmese, and other South Asian surnames. They've held seminars and panel discussions on the issues at stake, with a South Asian twist: They munch on *samosas*, triangle-shaped appetizers stuffed with spiced vegetables."

According to the article, Mass Desi Vote has successfully "...registered 300 voters and called more than 10,000 registered voters - nearly every Massachusetts household with a registered South Asian voter."

Project IMPACT for South Asian Americans has led voter registration and mobilization activities since 1996.

<sup>\*</sup> Polling data used in this report are limited to polls conducted since July of this year, when NCLR released its last study of the Latino electorate and provided an overview of polls available at that time.

**T**he National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA) formed an informal coalition to increase voter registration and participation among Latino voters in different parts of the country. The following highlight specific efforts undertaken by each organization.

**LOCATION:** Multistate Effort

**POPULATION:** Latinos

**ORGANIZATION:** National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)

**Contact:** Marcelo Gaete, Senior Director of Programs, mgaete@naleo.org

In 2001, the NALEO Educational Fund launched *Voces del Pueblo*, a nonpartisan campaign designed to increase Latino political participation by reaching out to low-propensity Latino registered voters who are the most likely to opt out of the electoral process. *Voces* is a multi layered approach conducted in three phases: listening to the community through interactive community forums, giving Latinos a voice and access to the candidates by conducting candidate debates and/or forums, and engaging the community in the electoral process through a targeted GOTV effort. The program is designed to provide information and an invitation to participation.

Additionally, in 2002 NALEO conducted focus groups and a poll of Latino registered voters to determine themes for its *Voces* 2002 campaign. The poll also provided information on Latino voter behavior and attitudes.

Originally working in the cities of Los Angeles, New York, and Houston, in 2002 *Voces* added communities in Colorado's Denver Metropolitan Area, California's Orange County, and throughout New Mexico. The initiative reached 397,500 low-

addition, the Pew Hispanic Center notes that party affiliation among Latinos who plan to become U.S. citizens - who represent one-third of the total population - has not yet solidified; only 22% of this group identify as Democrats, 14% say they are Republicans, and 35% call themselves Independents.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, as NCLR has noted in the past, Latino voters appear to be willing to cross party lines for individual candidates, even when strongly affiliated with one party; for example, Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and Pete Domenici (R-NM) regularly do well among Latino voters in their states, and in 1998, many of the same voters who supported Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) also voted for Republican Governor Jeb Bush.<sup>20</sup> The 2002 election appears to continue the trend of Latino "ticket splitting." An entrance poll conducted in Colorado showed Republican Governor Bill Owen, who was re-elected, and Democratic Senatorial candidate Tom Strickland, who was defeated, leading among Latino voters.<sup>21</sup> In New Mexico, reports indicate that both Governor-elect Bill Richardson,<sup>22</sup> a Democrat, and Senator Pete Domenici,<sup>23</sup> a Republican, garnered a majority of Hispanic votes.

- **Issues appear to trump party affiliation among Hispanic voters.** Polling data over the last several years have consistently demonstrated very strong views on key issues among Latino voters, regardless of party affiliation. These results have been confirmed by several recent polls. For example, the Pew Hispanic Center found that when registered Latino voters were asked which issues might be important in determining their votes, they emphasized education far more than any other group. Similarly, a recent poll conducted by AOL Time Warner found that 95% of Hispanics support bilingual education,<sup>24</sup> and several polls found that approximately 85% of Latinos are in favor of proposals to provide legal status to undocumented immigrants.<sup>25</sup> These results are remarkably consistent with similar polls taken over several years, and appear impervious to political climate or party affiliation.<sup>26</sup>

- Several recent polls provide new insights into the concerns of Latino voters.** The AOL Time Warner poll found that more than 80% of Latino respondents rate “child care assistance” and “police/community relations” as “very” or “extremely” important.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Pew Hispanic Center found that Latino voters affiliated with both political parties were much more likely than other groups to support a “larger government,” even if it were to mean higher taxes. Similarly, Pew found that Latino voters of both parties were more socially conservative than other groups.<sup>28</sup>
- Latinos’ concerns were not reflected in the “hot” issues of the 2002 election.** In its July 2002 analysis of the electorate, NCLR argued that, while both political parties are investing heavily in ethnic outreach and Spanish-language advertising, both sides appear only to be translating their mainstream messages, rather than addressing specific concerns identified by Latinos as major priorities. For example, even though education consistently scores high as the chief concern for Latinos, there is little evidence that either party emphasized education in campaign strategies. In another example, a poll by the Latino Coalition identifies post-September 11 negative attitudes toward immigrants specifically as a growing concern among Latinos; this is not a topic being discussed explicitly by either political party.<sup>29</sup>

## **Preliminary Analysis of the 2002 Election**

Absence of comprehensive, national exit poll data, especially the lack of exit poll demographic information from Voter News Service,<sup>\*</sup> has greatly curtailed the ability to analyze the impact of Latino and immigrant participation in the midterm election. However, based on “entrance” poll data, general election returns, and limited exit poll information cited in numerous newspaper

<sup>\*</sup> On November 5, 2002, Voter News Service (VNS), the vote-counting service that provides exit poll data and breakdowns of how people voted by age, sex, education, income, and political views, announced that due to technical difficulties it would not provide detailed information on voting patterns or how certain groups voted. VNS is a consortium of the major television networks and the Associated Press.

propensity Latino voters through direct mail and phone, contacting each voter between five and seven times. Additionally, 200,000 voter registration cards were mailed to eligible Latinos in the Los Angeles County area. NALEO also produced radio and television Public Service Announcements that were aired in its target communities.

**LOCATION: Multistate Effort**

**POPULATION: Latinos**

**ORGANIZATION: National Council of La Raza (NCLR)**

**Contact:** Clarissa Martinez De Castro,  
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In 2002, NCLR unveiled the nonpartisan Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project (LEAP), an initiative that seeks to increase Latino voter participation in states that have experienced substantial Latino population growth, through partnerships with local community-based organizations and repetitive voter contact.

Launched in four states, LEAP reached close to 110,000 Latinos through direct mail, phone, and door-to-door efforts. Each voter was contacted between two and six times. Partner organizations included Arizona’s Chicanos Por La Causa (CPLC), Colorado’s Latin American Research And Service Agency (LARASA), Latino Vote Iowa (a task force of community activists and local organizations in Polk County), and North Carolina’s El Pueblo, Inc. These groups organized weekend canvassing and Election Day operations to energize Latino voter participation, partnered with local media outlets to remind Latinos to vote, and offered both polling place information and rides to the polls.

This multistate get-out-the-vote effort represents one phase of LEAP’s broader set of strategies. Over the next two years, LEAP will work to build and strengthen a network of local organizations, to link naturalization with voter registration, connect newly-



registered voters with voter education and GOTV activities, and work toward incorporating civic participation themes more effectively into high school, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), and naturalization curricula.

**LOCATION: Multistate Effort**

**POPULATION: Latinos**

**ORGANIZATION: Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA)**

**Contact:** Marcos Vilar, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, mvilar@prfaa.com

In July 2002, PRFAA launched *¡Que Nada Nos Detenga!*, a nonpartisan voter registration and mobilization campaign aimed at increasing the electoral participation of Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics. PRFAA, which serves as the mainland office of the Governor of Puerto Rico, registered over 70,000 voters through its efforts in Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

In those same states, PRFAA implemented a GOTV campaign that reached 120,000 households through direct mail and automated calls. Some sites included door-to-door canvassing and transportation to the polls. Additionally, PRFAA launched a paid-media campaign that reached potential voters through television and radio advertisements, billboards, and print messages. Each voter reached by the campaign was contacted a minimum of two times.

To build a stronger knowledge-base of the voting patterns and issues of concern to the mainland Puerto Rican community, PRFAA conducted an exit poll on Election Day 2002, in which Puerto Rican voters cited jobs and the economy as their number-one issue. The poll was conducted in precincts in Chicago, IL; New York, NY; and Orlando and Homestead, FL.

articles, a partial picture of these groups' performance is starting to emerge:

- ▶ **Latino candidates for elected office, of both parties, achieved at least two key milestones.** The nation will have the first Hispanic governor in nearly 20 years with the election of Bill Richardson in New Mexico. Moreover, the number of Hispanic members of Congress will increase to the highest total ever in U.S. history, from 21 to 24, having added a Republican from Florida, Mario Diaz-Balart, and Democrats Linda Sanchez of California and Raul Grijalva of Arizona. In addition, California State Representative Dennis Cardoza, who won former Representative Gary Condit's seat and is of Portuguese descent, has announced his intention to join the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.
- ▶ **Latino (and immigrant) voters appear to have made a difference in key races.** While a thorough analysis of full election results is not possible without exit polling data, there are several examples of issues and races in which Latino and immigrant voters appear to have exerted their influence. For example, the *Rocky Mountain News* reported Latino turnout as a major factor in the defeat of Colorado's Amendment 31, an antibilingual education measure.<sup>30</sup> According to that paper, voters in Denver's three most heavily Hispanic-populated neighborhoods rejected Amendment 31 by a 2 to 1 ratio. Similarly, in the closely contested race for governor of Arizona, the Arizona Republic reported that Democratic candidate Janet Napolitano was helped to victory by the 65% turnout in Pima County.<sup>31</sup> Pima is the county with the second-largest Latino population in the state (61.5%).
- ▶ **Latino voter behavior in the 2002 election provided further evidence that Latinos judge candidates by their record and issue positions, not party affiliation.** There were key examples of Latinos supporting or opposing candidates based on their perceived responsiveness - or lack thereof - to the Latino community [see box]. In Florida, Republican Governor Jeb Bush, who made significant efforts to reach non-Cuban Latino voters who tend to identify as Democrats, won

majority-Democratic precincts with the largest number of Latino voters in several counties.<sup>32</sup>

## A TALE OF TWO GOVERNORS

No two races better demonstrated that Latinos weigh candidates by their record and issue positions than those for governor in New York and California. In New York, Republican Governor George Pataki aggressively courted Latinos and immigrants during his second term, despite the fact that over 70% of Latino voters in the state identify themselves as Democrats. Pataki conducted considerable outreach efforts and sought alliances with - and garnered endorsements from - many Latino organizations. He also embraced issues of concern to Latinos in the state, such as vocally opposing the military exercises on the Puerto Rican Island of Vieques, and calling for Temporary Protected Status for Colombian immigrants. A study by John Mollenkopf of the City University of New York's Center for Urban Research shows that Hispanic support for Pataki grew by nearly 40% since the previous election. Thirty-eight percent of the Latino vote went to Pataki, compared with 25% in 1998.<sup>33</sup> According to the *New York Times*, Pataki's biggest improvement by county was in the Bronx - the county with the highest proportion of Latinos in the state - where he won 31% of the vote, up from 23% in 1998. On the other hand, a substantial number of California Latinos apparently expressed dissatisfaction with Governor Gray Davis in a state in which Latino voters have overwhelmingly supported every Democrat for statewide and national office during the last five election cycles. Davis' relationship with Latinos in the state has deteriorated since his election in 1998, especially after he vetoed or blocked several measures popular among Hispanics, most recently legislation expanding immigrant access to drivers' licenses. According to Voter News Service data, more than three-quarters of Latinos (78%) supported Governor Gray Davis in 1998, while less than two-thirds of Latinos (65%) voted for Davis in 2002, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Twenty-four percent of Latino voters supported the Republican candidate (compared with 17% in 1998), and 11% supported the Independent candidate. In an election in which many reported not liking either candidate, Latino participation decreased by three points over 1998 figures, from 13% to 10% of the state electorate.<sup>34</sup> All these factors contributed to Davis' unexpectedly thin margin of victory.

In addition, in Texas, where Republican Congressman Henry Bonilla had formerly won by substantial margins, a challenge by former Democratic Texas Secretary of State Henry Cuellar led to an uncharacteristically close election in that district. Latino voters, who are heavily represented in that district, home to Texas gubernatorial candidate Tony Sanchez, exhibited high turnout rates and appear to have been a factor in the changing voting patterns in that election.

- ▶ **The 2002 election provided evidence that candidates perceived as pro-immigrant garnered support from Latino and other pro-immigrant voters.** Conversely, perceptions of hostility or indifference to immigrants cost several candidates support in the Latino community. In addition to the already cited examples of George Pataki in New York and Jeb Bush in Florida, pro-immigrant Democrat Tom Vilsack was re-elected as governor of Iowa, with considerable support from the state's small but fast-growing Hispanic community. For example, the Governor carried Polk County, home to one of the largest groups of Latino voters in the state. Republican Greg Ganske, a candidate for the Senate running on an anti-immigrant platform in Iowa, was also defeated by Senator Tom Harkin who has a strong pro-immigrant and Latino voting record. And, in California, Gray Davis' decidedly mixed record on immigrant issues and Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill Simon's eleventh-hour embrace of former Governor Pete Wilson, a noted anti-immigrant voice, not only reduced Davis' share of the Latino vote but kept many Latinos away from the polls.
- ▶ **There are significant opportunities for party realignment and shifts in voting patterns.** Candidates who have invested in learning about and understanding the priorities of the community - and addressing at least some of its concerns - do well, regardless of party, as illustrated by the Iowa, Florida, and New York gubernatorial races. Furthermore, young Latino voters are not clearly aligned with any one party. There will be significant numbers of Latinos coming of age and joining the electorate in the next decade. If the current trend of low participation rates among this age group is to shift, it will likely require a combination of targeted mobilization strategies and

candidates' willingness to address issues that inspire this segment of the electorate.

- There is substantial room for increasing the participation of Latino and immigrant voters.** An increase is both achievable and likely to have substantial impact on the outcome of future elections. Multifaceted strategies will be needed in order to realize the potential of these segments of future voters. These include reducing the citizenship backlogs, to allow those whose have languished in the pipeline finally to be able to participate fully in our political process, and making the citizenship process more accessible to those who are eligible.
- The emergence of many new, nonpartisan efforts aimed at mobilizing Latino and immigrant voters is a positive development that should be expanded.** One such campaign, the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration's (PRFAA) *¡Que Nada Nos Detenga!*, concluded its multistate voter mobilization efforts with an exit poll by Bendixen and Associates which found that 15% of Puerto Ricans casting votes in this election were first-time voters. Of Puerto Rican voters interviewed, 87% reported having had exposure to the campaign.

Further, the range of short stories contained in this report illustrates a new energy within immigrant and Latino communities focused on increasing civic participation. Polling and focus group data undertaken by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) and NCLR indicated that voting-age Latinos identify Latino and community-based organizations as groups they would trust in obtaining civic education and voter participation information. This is likely to be true of non-Latino immigrant communities as well. NCLR hopes that continued efforts by community leaders and institutions to mobilize Latino and immigrant voters will achieve the goals of stimulating these segments of the electorate and strengthening American democracy.

# Endnotes

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- 1 See Susan Milligan, "Midterms May Hinge on Votes of Latinos," *Boston Globe*, October 31, 2002; "Campaigns Take on an Ethnic Flavor," *The Washington Post*, October 2002; "Hispanic Vote Surges to the Forefront," *Statesman Journal*, November 3, 2002; Harold Meyerson, "The Rising Latino Tide," *The American Prospect*, Vol. 13, No. 21, November 18, 2002.
- 2 NCLR worked closely with a number of partners, especially the National Immigration Forum, to add additional information and include new perspectives on the immigrant electorate.
- 3 Information taken from *Mobilizing the Latino Vote: Tapping the Power of the Hispanic Electorate*, Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, July 2002.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 NCLR projections based on information from U.S. Census Bureau, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*, Current Population Reports, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, February 2002.
- 6 Data from *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*, *op.cit.*, and U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File I, Table P12H. Sex by Age (Hispanic or Latino) [49].  
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTable?\\_ts=55266087609](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTable?_ts=55266087609)
- 7 *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*, *op.cit.*
- 8 U.S. Census Bureau, *Coming to America: A Profile of the Nation's Foreign Born (2002 Update)*, Census Brief 2002, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, February 2002.
- 9 U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Profiles: 1990 and 2000 Comparison Tables, [http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/dp\\_comptables.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2002/dp_comptables.html).
- 10 Data on total citizen population of voting age from *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*; data on foreign-born citizen population from microdata from the November 1996, 1998, and 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Surveys, which include supplementary questions on voting and registration.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 2000, Ethnic



- and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, March 2000.
- 13 U.S. Census Bureau, *Citizenship Status, Year of Entry, and Region of Birth for Foreign-Born Population, 2000*, Current Population Survey, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, March 2000.
  - 14 U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service website, <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/msraug02/NATZ.HTM>
  - 15 *Ibid.*
  - 16 Microdata from the November 1996, 1998, and 2000 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Surveys.
  - 17 This includes the Pew Hispanic Center *National Survey of Latinos*, Washington, DC: October 2002; the Latino Coalition, *National Survey of Hispanic Adults*, Washington, DC, August 2002; The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), *The NALEO Survey of Latino Voters*, Los Angeles, CA, September 2002; and a poll by the Gallup Organization on Hispanic voters, as reported by David W. Moore, "Hispanic Vote Favors Democrats in Congressional Election," Gallup News Service, October 17, 2002.
  - 18 Pew Hispanic Center, *op.cit.*
  - 19 *Ibid.*
  - 20 *The Latino Vote in the '90s*, Issue Brief No. 4, Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, October 2000.
  - 21 Colorado MSNBC/Zogby Poll - Senate Poll conducted Oct. 31 - Nov. 2, 2002, of 500 likely voters statewide. Margin of sampling error 4.5%.
  - 22 Navarette Ruben, "Hispanic Vote Starts to Show Some Strength," *The Dallas Morning News*, November 10, 2002.
  - 23 "Domenici Way Ahead of Tristani," *Albuquerque Journal*, October 14, 2002.
  - 24 America On Line Time Warner Foundation/*People En Español* Hispanic Opinion Tracker Survey (HOT). The Cheskin Group conducted the survey of 6,000 U.S. adults, June-August 2002.

- 25 These results were consistent in the Pew Hispanic Center, Latino Coalition, and AOL Time Warner polls.
- 26 See NCLR, *Mobilizing the Latino Vote*, July 2002, *op.cit.* for a summary of polling data conducted over a period of several years.
- 27 AOL Time Warner, *op.cit.*
- 28 Pew Hispanic Center, *op.cit.*
- 29 Latino Coalition, *National Survey of Hispanic Adults*, *op.cit.*
- 30 "Latino Voters Said No to 31," *RockyMountainNews.com*, November 7, 2002.
- 31 "Napolitano is the Next Governor," *The Arizona Republic*, November 11, 2002.
- 32 "Bush Wins Hispanic Support; McBride Fails to Woo Black Voters," *Orlando Sentinel*, November 7, 2002.
- 33 "Familiar Results Belie Voting Bloc Breakdown," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2002.
- 34 Exit Poll, *Los Angeles Times*: exit poll interviews conducted with 3,444 voters, November 5, 2002.