



Latino Voters and the 2010 Election: Numbers, Parties, and Issues

OVERVIEW

Compared with presidential election voter turnout, midterm elections exhibit a decrease in participation across the electoral spectrum, including Latino¹ voter turnout. Therefore, a more accurate examination of participation in the upcoming midterm election should be based on comparisons with previous midterms. This year there are additional competing factors shaping turnout for the Latino electorate. On the one hand, high rates of unemployment stemming from the economic crisis, displacement created by the foreclosure crisis, and lack of progress on issues of interest to the Hispanic community could reasonably lead to a prediction of lower Latino participation levels in 2010. On the other hand, polling and local civic engagement efforts point to deep concern in the community over growing anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment as an energizing factor motivating Latino voters to show up at the polls in November.¹ Based on the choices voters have, how candidates are defining themselves on these issues, and whether candidates are reaching out meaningfully to Latinos, it remains to be seen which of these factors will come out as the determinants.²

Although Latinos receive less attention in midterm elections, in 2010 they are poised to play a decisive role in election outcomes. If 2006 naturalization, registration, and voting patterns hold constant, it is possible that an additional 700,000 Latino voters will cast their vote. More than 70% of the Latino electorate is concentrated in five states—California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona. They have the potential to shift contested races in California, Florida, Illinois, Nevada, and New Mexico and to make significant contributions to voter turnout in states such as Arizona, Colorado, and Texas. Furthermore, while Latinos represent relatively smaller segments of the electorate in other states, the steady growth of Hispanic participation at the polls throughout the nation, combined with tighter margins of victory in a number of races, will prove to have a significant impact in additional states in the future.

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¹ The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

THE LATINO ELECTORATE

In 2009 the Latino population reached 48.4 million. Latinos are a young population, with a median age of 27, compared with 39 for the non-Hispanic population. Nearly three out of every four (73.6%) Latinos are U.S. citizens. In other words, they represent a vital and growing electorate. In terms of current voting eligibility (see Figure 1):

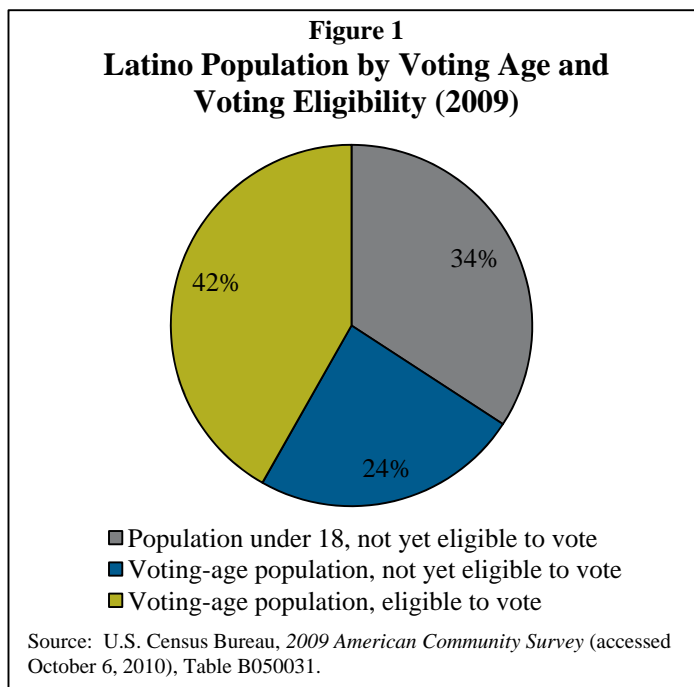
- More than one-third of the Hispanic population, or 16.7 million, is under the age of 18 and thus not eligible to vote, compared with 22% for the non-Hispanic population. However, 93% of Latinos under age 18 are U.S. citizens, and each year 500,000 come of age, making this cohort a major source fueling Latino voter growth for years to come and elevating the importance of effective youth participation strategies.

- Another 24% of Latinos, or 11.5 million, are adult immigrants not yet eligible to vote. It is estimated that more than four million are currently eligible to apply for citizenship. This cohort represents another source of Latino electoral growth and denotes the importance of continued immigrant integration strategies that assist eligible immigrants in navigating the naturalization process.³

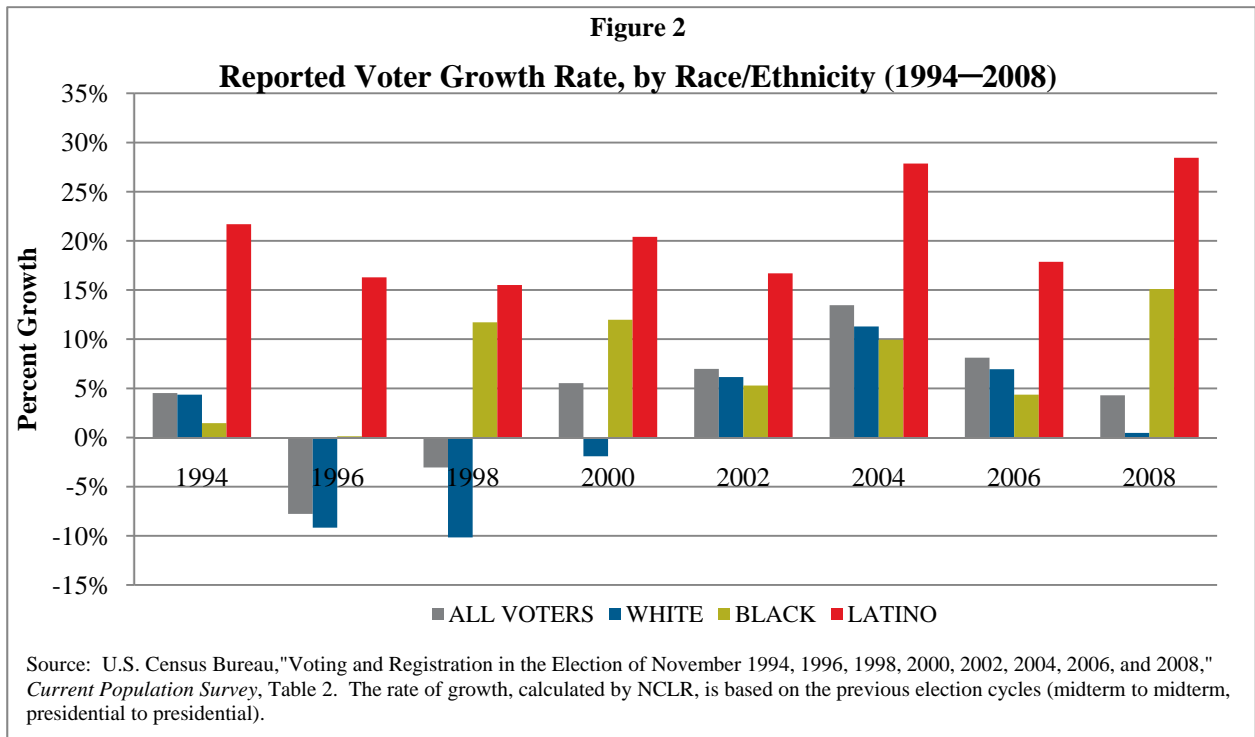
- This means that nearly 42% of Latinos, or slightly more than 20 million, are eligible to vote.

Although the rate of electoral participation for Latinos still lags behind that of other groups, this electorate is gaining traction for two main reasons:

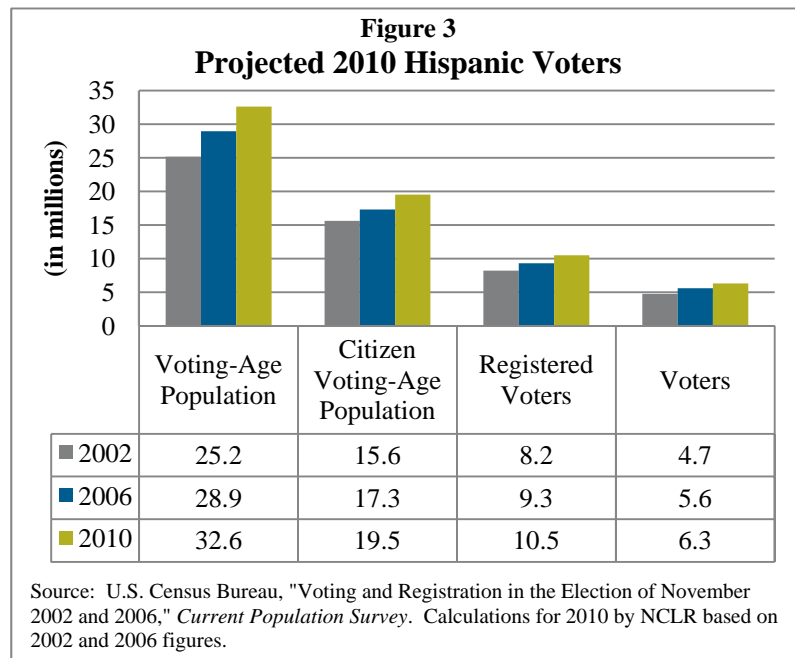
- Latino registered voters are concentrated in states that are either rich in electoral-college votes or are electoral battlegrounds, or both—California, Florida, and Texas comprise 61% of Latino registered voters. The top ten states in order of share of Latino registered voters nationwide are California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, New Jersey, Illinois, New Mexico, Colorado, and Pennsylvania. Combined, these states comprise 85% of Latino voters. At times, this has meant that a sizeable share of the Latino electorate receives little attention, particularly when races in these states do not appear to be close. However, as electoral races across the country become more closely contested, this trend is shifting, as is the case this year in states such as California and Illinois.
- The Latino electorate exhibits the largest registration and voting growth rates of any group in the U.S. (see Figure 2). In the 2008 presidential election, Latino voting participation grew by



28.4% over 2004 levels, compared with 0.5% for Whites and 15% for Blacks. In the last set of midterm elections, between 2002 and 2006, Latino voting participation grew by 18%, compared with 7% for Whites and 4.4% for Blacks.



The Latino electorate, combined with the growth of the Latino population nationally, is emerging as a significant factor in states not traditionally associated with this population. In the 2008 presidential election, for example, Latino voters participated in numbers greater than the margins of victory in North Carolina and Indiana, and 11.6% of the votes cast in Nevada were Latino.



Of Latino citizens over 18 years old, in 2006 9.3 million were registered to vote and 5.6 million voted. If 2006 rates of naturalization, registration, and voting stayed constant, there could be an additional 700,000 Latino voters casting a ballot in 2010 (see Figure 3). This would represent a growth of 12.4% above 2006 turnout numbers, reaching 6.3 million Latino voters. This is a conservative estimate; Census estimates for 2009 already exceed the voting-age population figures in this simple projection

PARTY AFFILIATION

Traditionally, Hispanic voters register as Democrat by a 2:1 margin. However, registration has not always provided a true reflection of support at the polls. Regardless of party affiliation, Latinos demonstrate a willingness to support candidates who reach out meaningfully to the community, take positions on issues that matter to Hispanics, and build a relationship with the community. President George W. Bush’s presidential and gubernatorial campaigns are good examples of this.

Additionally, Hispanic voters show a willingness to “split the ticket” rather than voting straight party-line. Previous NCLR reports document several examples: Florida Latinos voted 61% for Republican Jeb Bush in the governor’s race in 1998, while voting 65% for Democrat Bob Graham in the Senate race. In 2004, Arizona Latinos voted 56% for Democrat John Kerry in the presidential race and 74% for Republican John McCain in the Senate race. In 2006, Florida Latinos split evenly, voting 49% for Republican Charlie Christ and 49% for Democrat Jim Davis in the gubernatorial race, while in California 39% supported Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and 71% supported Democrat Dianne Feinstein in the Senate race.

Year	Source	%Rep	%Dem	
2008		McCain	Obama	Other
	Natl. Election Pool (NEP)*	31	67	2
2004		Bush	Kerry	Other
	NEP**	44	53	2
	Los Angeles Times (LAT)	45	54	1
	New York Times (NYT)	43	56	
2000		Bush	Gore	Other
	Voter News Service (VNS)	35	62	3
	LAT	38	61	1
	NYT	31	67	2
1996		Dole	Clinton	Other
	VNS	21	72	6
	LAT	21	71	7
1992		Bush	Clinton	Other
	VNS	25	61	14
	LAT	27	51	21
1988		Bush	Dukakis	
	VNS	30	69	
	LAT	34	65	

* In 2008, LAT and NYT tracked the NEP exit poll, and thus are not reported here.
 ** On December 3, 2004, NBC issued a statement lowering Bush’s share of the Hispanic vote to 40%, although NEP data were not officially edited or modified (*First Read - MSNBC.com*, December 3, 2004. Available online at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6531105/>). The precursor to NEP was VNS, which was disbanded in 2003 after controversies over the 2000 and 2002 election results.
 Source for 1988–2004 chart: *How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?* Washington, DC: NCLR, November 15, 2004. Revised January 15, 2005.

Between 1988 and 2004, the percentage of Latinos voting for Democratic presidential candidates, while fluctuating, generally decreased, with the exception of a 71% historic high supporting President Bill Clinton in 1996⁴ (see Table 1). The 2006 election, however, presented a notable Latino shift away from the Republican column. Compared with the 37% share of Latino support that went to Republicans in 2002, and Bush’s 40% share in 2004, Latino Republican support in the 2006 election was 30%.⁵ That year the immigration debate took a decidedly negative turn, with the introduction of one of the most punitive anti-immigrant measures in recent time. H.R. 4437, which became known simply as the “Sensenbrenner bill,” included provisions to criminalize the presence of undocumented persons in the United States, construct

additional fencing along the U.S.- Mexico border, and impose criminal penalties upon anyone who knowingly assists an undocumented person.⁶ Reaction to that proposal generated more than 136 peaceful pro-immigrant rallies in 39 states and the District of Columbia, with millions participating. That same reaction was a contributing factor to the record number of Latinos immigrants eligible for naturalization who became citizens between 2006 and 2007. Although the bill did not become law, it intensified anti-immigrant rhetoric—particularly by Republican political campaigns, nativist groups, and certain media personalities—and thus acted as a factor pushing Latinos away from the Republican Party.

The shift toward the Democratic Party continued in 2008. The economy was undeniably the main concern for Latino voters, but immigration also played a role in their attitudes and perceptions. Presidential candidates Senator Barack Obama and Senator John McCain both ran ads in Spanish-language media on the issue of immigration to appeal to Latino voters. Although the issue was not prominent at the presidential level in the post-primary season, the anti-immigrant vitriol it generated in the Republican primary, and subsequently in some down-ticket races, kept it in the mind of Latino voters and further tarnished the Republican brand, hurting Senator McCain as well. In Arizona, for example, Senator McCain received 41% of the Arizona Latino vote in the presidential race, compared with the 74% he had received in his previous Senate race in 2004. Nationally, Latinos favored Obama over McCain, 67% to 31%, a loss of nine percentage points for the Republican candidate over the previous presidential election.⁷

Table 2
Impact of the Latino Vote in Battleground States

State and Electoral Votes	Estimated Latino Vote*	Latino 2008 Presidential Preference		Obama Victory Margin	State Winner 2004	Latino 2004 Presidential Preference	
		Obama	McCain			Kerry	Bush
Colorado (9)	290,801	61%	38%	196,658	Bush	68%	30%
Florida (27)	1,131,667	57%	42%	204,577	Bush	44%	56%
Nevada (5)	141,581	76%	22%	119,896	Bush	60%	39%
New Mexico (5)	330,980	69%	30%	120,707	Bush	56%	44%
Indiana (11)	108,367	77%	23%	25,836	Bush	N/A	N/A
No. Carolina (15)	126,993	N/A	N/A	13,692	Bush	N/A	N/A
Virginia (13)	184,221	65%	34%	232,317	Bush	56%	44%

* Number based on state total vote count for Obama/McCain, multiplied by estimated Latino share of electorate, as reported in NEP/CNN Exit Poll as of 11/16/08. State breakdown excludes votes cast for other candidates. Source for 2004: NEP/CNN Exit Poll. Note that Census figures indicate lower numbers for total Latino votes cast. However, IN and NC still observe a larger number of Latino voters than the margin of victory. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/>; see also NCLR, *The Latino Electorate: Profiles and Trends*, Table 2.

The Hispanic vote was a significant factor in augmenting the national popular vote margin in 2008, and a decisive element in several key battleground states such as Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada—states with significant numbers of Latino voters which President Bush won in 2004 and which went to the Obama column in 2008 (see Table 2). In Nevada in 2004, 10% of the electorate was Hispanic; by 2008, exit polls showed Hispanic voters increased their share to 15% of Nevada's electorate.⁸ In 2008, Hispanics in Nevada supported Obama at a higher rate than in most other states, at 76%.⁹ In Colorado, the Latino electorate grew from 8% in 2004 to 17% in 2008; Obama received 61% of the Latino vote, key to his 53% to 46% victory over McCain in that state, albeit a lower share of Latino support than Senator John Kerry received in 2004.

Table 3
Latino Voters 2006 and Projected 2010 in Selected States

State	2006	2010	Change Between 2002 and 2006		Latino Share of Vote	
			Number	%	2006	2010
Arizona	272,000	365,397	93,397	34%	15%	18%
California	1,717,000	1,978,031	261,031	15%	17%	20%
Colorado	158,000	251,995	93,995	59%	9%	13%
Florida	514,000	608,429	94,429	18%	10%	11%
Illinois	185,000	211,272	26,272	14%	5%	5%
New Jersey	165,000	199,208	34,208	21%	7%	8%
New Mexico	233,000	277,404	44,404	19%	32%	34%
New York	390,000	439,973	49,973	13%	7%	9%
Texas	945,000	1,064,844	119,844	13%	17%	19%

Source: NALEO Educational Fund, *The Latino Vote: 2010 Projections*, released October 19, 2010. <http://www.naleo.org/downloads/Latino%20Vote%20Projections%202010%20fin%2010-10.pdf>

In 2010, Latino voters will play decisive roles in House, Senate, and gubernatorial races in several states. Tightly contested statewide races in California, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico will hinge on Latino votes, with similar stories in Colorado and Illinois. Additionally, turnout in Arizona and Texas will be followed closely because of what it foreshadows for future elections,

particularly in 2012. The Latino share of the vote in each of those states is growing (see calculations in Table 3 by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials [NALEO] Educational Fund, based on the average Latino vote percentage change in congressional elections between 1994 and 2006). Nevada was excluded due to high variance in corresponding data points. However, between 2002 and 2006, the number of Latino voters grew by 19%.

It will be interesting to look at the methods and the extent to which parties and candidates reached out to Latinos in 2010. In 2006, only 38% of Latino voters reported being contacted by the Democratic Party about the election, and only 29% by the Republican Party.¹⁰ Additionally, when investments are made in outreach to Latinos, both parties seem to quantify this in terms of Spanish-language buys, even though polling of Latino voters consistently shows that they consume news and information from English-language as well as Spanish-language sources, with many getting their information from both sources equally.¹¹ In efforts to appeal to Latino voters this year, Republicans seem to have concentrated on positioning a few Latino candidates (Marco Rubio in Florida, Brian Sandoval in Nevada, and Susana Martinez in New Mexico) rather than promoting immigration positions more closely aligned with the views of Latino voters which are focused on finding real solutions and are supported by the majority of all Americans—as demonstrated in multiple polls.

A QUICK GLANCE AT THE ISSUES

Education, jobs, and the economy have traditionally topped the list of Hispanic priorities. Jobs speak to the breadwinners' ability to provide for their families, and education to their children's ability to do better and go further than they have. It is no surprise, given the state of the economy, that Latino voters in 2010 have placed jobs and the economy at the top of their list (see Table 4). Latinos are and will continue to be deeply affected by progress on economic recovery, especially regarding the creation of new jobs, the successful implementation of health care reform, and the continuing effort to improve the nation's educational system.

As documented in previous NCLR reports, Latinos are motivated by broader social and policy concerns, and their issue priorities are reflective of their fellow Americans’ priorities, although their specific concerns within these priority areas may be different. In 2008, for example, the economic crisis ranked higher than almost all other issues for Latinos, and 2008 exit polls showed this to be paramount for most White and Black voters as well. In 2010, despite the official end of the recession, Latinos continue to experience the economic downturn acutely; Latino unemployment hovers at about two percentage points higher than the national rate, at around 12%. It is estimated that 17% of Latino homeowners have either lost their homes or are at imminent risk, and this is affecting families well beyond the loss of a physical home, with long-term effects on economic and emotional well-being.¹² On the health care front, between 2008 and 2009 an additional 1.2 million Latinos went uninsured, and nationwide nearly one-third (32.4%) of all Latinos had no form of health insurance. By and large, federal relief efforts aimed at preventing a greater economic crisis were not targeted to areas of greatest need, which has contributed to the slower pace of economic recovery in Latino communities.

A look at polling over the last decade shows that immigration has not been at the top of the Latino issue agenda. This has led some pundits to assert that Latinos do not care about immigration, or to misinterpret the role this issue plays when it comes to Latino participation. The reality is that when immigration is part of the political debate—as it has been over the last several years—it becomes a test through which Latinos gauge how politicians and parties regard their community, because immigration policies, and the tone of this debate, carry civil rights implications for the entire Latino community, regardless of immigration status.

For example, in 2006, in an election-eve poll of Latino voters commissioned by NCLR, while immigration tied in fourth place on the list of Latino voter issue priorities, it was cited by 51% of those voters as the most important (32%) or one of the most important (19%) factors deciding their vote.

Most important issues:	NCLR/SEIU 4/23/10	NALEO* 7/20/10	PHC** 9/19/10	LD 10/11/10
Economy	40%			32.1%
Education	12%	6%	58%	14.1%
Environment			29%	
Health care	20%	7%	51%	14.2%
Immigration	10%	27%	31%	24.6%
Jobs/Unemployment		15%	54%	23.4%
Cost of living		8%		
Budget/deficit	2%		35%	
Government reform	2%			

Responses reflect differences in issue battery categories in each poll. Responses are for Latino registered voters. Dates are for the day poll was concluded in the field.
 *NALEO results displayed as average of responses received from a survey of Latinos in CA, CO, FL, and TX.
 **Respondents were asked to rank importance of each issue, rather than choose top issue; totals will not equal 100%.

In 2010, immigration climbed the list of Latino voter priorities (see Table 4), touched off by passage in late April of Arizona’s SB 1070, a law that would allow local law enforcement to ask for proof of legal status of those they come into contact with if they have a “reasonable suspicion” that they are undocumented; the law has been temporarily enjoined by the courts. In a poll conducted in May, NCLR found elevated

concern about racial profiling among Arizona's Latino voters, with 72% responding that the police would choose Latinos when deciding whom to question about legal status. Immigration rose to the number one issue for these voters. Similarly, immigration was the top issue for Latino voters in California, Colorado, Florida, and Texas in a July poll conducted by NALEO.

Since immigration tends to have an energizing effect on Latino participation even when not at the top of their issue priorities, in 2010 it could help augment Latino participation by countering lower levels of interest in the election stemming from other factors and lack of progress on key issues. A Pew Hispanic Center poll reported that among Latino registered voters, two-thirds reported discussing immigration in the past year and showed greater motivation to vote this November compared to those who had not discussed immigration.¹³

CONCLUSION

The last several midterm election cycles have demonstrated a steady increase in Latino voter participation rates—15.5% from 1994 to 1998, 16.7% from 1998 to 2002, and 17.9% from 2002 to 2006—albeit a smaller pace of growth than between presidential elections. Latinos could add anywhere between 700,000 to nearly a million voters to the electorate.¹⁴ According to NALEO, nationally the Latino share of the vote could increase by a full percentage point, from 6% to 7%. The true impact will be felt at the state level, where the Latino share of the vote could increase by four percentage points in Colorado (from 9% to 13% of that state's electorate), and three percentage points in Arizona and California.¹⁵ The largest Latino share of state electorates will be in New Mexico, California, Texas, and Arizona, in that order.

The following are important themes based on our analysis of the Latino electorate:

- **Latinos will shape outcomes in multiple races.** Latinos have already proven to be an essential electoral element in the presidential context. Only a few days away from the midterm election, Senate races in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, and Nevada will be decided or shaped significantly by Latino turnout, as well as gubernatorial races in Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico. Multiple congressional races are also on this list, including districts in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and Texas, to name a few.
- **For Latinos in the 2010 midterm election, there are competing factors affecting turnout.** Unemployment and foreclosures resulting from the economic crisis, combined with lack of progress on immigration reform, are contributing to Latinos' tempered enthusiasm about the election. At the same time, there is deep concern over growing anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment in the country, hate speech, the threat of measures that legitimize the racial profiling of Latinos, and the movement to repeal birthright citizenship. Polling and local civic engagement efforts point to this growing concern as powerful motivating factor for Latino voters to go the polls.
- **Latinos are concerned about anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment.** Given this environment, it is no surprise that for the first time immigration has risen on the Latino voter agenda. Polling data and Hispanic voter behavior over multiple election cycles show that,

given its impact, immigration serves as a lens through which Latinos assess the political environment and candidates' attitudes, not just toward immigrants but toward their community as a whole. While the factors most likely to drive Hispanic voters to the polls have been a prominent point of speculation, voting for "respect" may be the clearest incentive that these voters have.

- **The numbers make clear that no party can afford to ignore Latino voters; however both parties have work to do.** Latinos look for candidates who speak to the issues they care about, and who do so with an understanding of how these issues affect Latinos. While many politicians are engaging in tactics that alienate or demonize the Hispanic community, others are not really working for this electorate's vote or clearly defining their positions on issues that matter to them. Both approaches are ill-conceived and leave Latino voters with fewer choices.
- **Strategies in support of immigrant integration and youth participation will increase Latino electoral growth.** More than three out of every ten Hispanics are under the age of 18. While nine out of every ten Latinos under age 18 are citizens, participation rates among young people of any group are lower than for the rest of the population and thus call for targeted efforts to improve engagement. Generally, Latinos have lower naturalization rates; high application fees and limited availability of English-language classes are two significant barriers contributing to this situation. However, naturalization rates are growing; of the immigrants who took that step between 2005 and 2007, 48% indicated they did so to be able to vote, or for legal, political, or civil rights reasons. Community-based efforts to help eligible immigrants navigate this process will continue to be an important part of the equation.

¹ See: National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund polling report “[Riled, Restless and Ready: Latinos in 2010 and Beyond](#),” which found that “The current debate around the issue of immigration is playing a significant role in the political decisions of registered Latino voters, including increasing the likelihood of voting, and influencing their selection of candidates;” Krissah Thompson, “[Will Arizona's immigration law motivate Latino voters?](#)”; *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2010.

² Latino Decisions [Tracking Poll](#) of Latino registered voters, 355 surveys, conducted September 17–31, 2010.

³ For additional information and analysis in this area, see Ricardo Ramirez and Olga Medina, *Catalysts and Barriers to Attaining Citizenship: An Analysis of ya es hora ¡Ciudadania!* (Washington, DC: NCLR, September 16, 2010). http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/catalysts_and_barriers_to_attaining_citizenship_an_analysis_of_ya_es_hora_ciudadania/.

⁴ Charles Kamasaki and Clarissa Martínez De Castro, *How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?* (Washington, DC: NCLR, November 16, 2004. Revised January 15, 2005), <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/download/28218>.

⁵ These data came from VNS and NEP exit poll data for 2002 and 2006, respectively, cited in [Latinos and the 2006 Mid-Term Election](#) (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2006).

⁶ *Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*, H.R. 4437, 109th Cong., 1st sess.

⁷ Calculation based on the adjusted numbers for 2004, with Latinos supporting Kerry at 59% and Bush at 40% and a total Latino vote of 7.65 million. For a more in-depth look, see Charles Kamasaki and Clarissa Martínez De Castro, *How Did Latinos Really Vote in 2004?*

⁸ CNN Exit Poll Data, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=NVP00p1> (accessed October 15, 2008).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ NCLR/NALEO Poll of Latino Voters and the 2006 Election, conducted by Lake Research Partners and Public Opinion Strategies, November 2–6, 2006, <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/download/43355>.

¹¹ Ibid; and We Are America Alliance, unpublished poll of immigrant community members, September 2010.

¹² Janis Bowdler, Roberto Quercia, and David Andrew Smith, *The Foreclosure Generation: The Long-Term Impact of the Housing Crisis on Latino Children and Families* (Washington DC: National Council of La Raza and Center for Community Capital (CCC) at the University of North Carolina, February 2010) http://www.nclr.org/index.php/publications/the_foreclosure_generation_the_long-term_impact_of_the_housing_crisis_on_latino_children_and_families/, (accessed October 25, 2010).

¹³ Mark Hugo Lopez, *Latinos in the 2010 Elections: Strong Support for Democrats; Weak Motivation* (Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, 2010).

¹⁴ NALEO Educational Fund estimates Latino turnout at 6.53 million—an additional 933,976 voters over 2006 turnout. See NALEO Educational Fund, *The Latino Vote: 2010 Projections* (Los Angeles, CA: NALEO EF, 2010), <http://www.naleo.org/downloads/Latino%20Vote%20Projections%202010%20fin%2010-10.pdf>.

¹⁵ Ibid.