



Catalysts and Barriers to Attaining Citizenship:  
**AN ANALYSIS OF *ya es hora ¡CIUDADANIA!***



The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio.

The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund is the leading national organization that empowers Latinos to participate fully in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. The NALEO Educational Fund carries out its mission through programs that promote the civic engagement of Latinos, provide technical assistance and professional development to the nation's Latino elected officials, and disseminate research on issues important to the Latino population. The NALEO Educational Fund is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization whose constituency includes the more than 6,000 Latino elected and appointed officials nationwide. Headquartered in Los Angeles, the NALEO Educational Fund carries out its mission with offices in Houston, New York City, and Washington, DC.

The *ya es hora* campaign is an historic nonpartisan Latino civic participation campaign launched as the Latino community's action-oriented follow-up to the immigrant mobilizations of 2006. The campaign represents the largest and most comprehensive effort to incorporate Latinos as full participants in the American political process, linking naturalization to voter participation and Census enumeration under a single message: "It's time." It is coordinated nationally by the Mi Familia Vota Education Fund, the NALEO Educational Fund, and NCLR with the support of Spanish-language media companies Entravision Communications Corporation, impreMedia LLC, and Univision Communications Inc. More than 400 community-based organizations complete the coalition throughout the country.

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**An Analysis of *ya es hora ¡CIUDADANIA!***

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## OVERVIEW

Between March 2006 and May 2006, numerous marches took place across America to protest the passage of H.R. 4437, which became commonly known as the “Sensenbrenner Bill” and was widely regarded as one of the most punitive anti-immigrant pieces of legislation in the last 70 years. H.R. 4437 included provisions that would 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 assisted any individual with an illegal immigration status.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that more than five million people participated in the marches, placing them among the largest and most widespread civil rights actions in U.S. history.<sup>2</sup> One of the ubiquitous calls to action stemming from the marches was “Today we march, tomorrow we vote,” which, in addition to spurring voter registration activities among those already eligible, also evoked renewed energy among legal immigrants to pursue citizenship.

More than a decade earlier, similar circumstances motivated Latinos to become citizens and register to vote. A contentious political climate in California, triggered by hostile immigrant legislation and political rhetoric, led to marches and subsequent increases in naturalization and voting rates among native-born and naturalized Latino voters. Proposition 187, a California ballot initiative that sought to deny public services to undocumented immigrants and required public officials to report individuals who they suspected were undocumented to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, generated intense backlash among Latinos, who perceived themselves as the primary targets of the measure.<sup>3</sup> Like Proposition 187, the “Sensenbrenner Bill” had a symbolic impact on Latinos and activated the community toward greater involvement in the political process.

At least in theory, our country places a high value on naturalization—the step immigrants take to become full Americans, with all the

rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship. However, in practice, not much support is available to help eligible immigrants navigate that process. For many, the naturalization process can seem complex and intimidating. In 2007, there were an estimated 8.2 million legal permanent residents who were eligible to naturalize.<sup>4</sup> That same year, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the federal agency that oversees the naturalization process, announced plans to raise the cost of the naturalization application from \$330 to \$595, an increase of 561% since 1990.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing the importance of helping eligible immigrants become U.S. citizens, several civic organizations and Spanish-language media providers came together and, in January 2007, launched the *ya es hora ¡CIUDADANIA!* (It’s Time, Citizenship!) campaign.\* Building on the momentum generated by the immigration marches to promote citizenship and civic participation, the campaign provided eligible immigrants with materials, information, and assistance. The campaign sought to increase the number of eligible Latinos<sup>†</sup> pursuing naturalization, an important step toward full political participation.

The *ya es hora ¡CIUDADANIA!* model was centered on three pillars: 1) strategy, coordination, training, and technical assistance through national civic organizations; 2) a Spanish-language public awareness campaign via national media companies; and 3) community education and support from local nonprofits and service providers. The campaign carried out its work through a series of public service announcements, advertisements, and earned media; a national bilingual hotline and website; local naturalization assistance workshops; distribution of reference materials; and *centros de ciudadanía* (citizenship centers) for one-on-one citizenship assistance. Activities were designed to educate the public about the requirements, process, and cost for becoming a citizen and provide assistance to those who were eligible to do so. At workshops and

\* The *ya es hora* campaign is a collaboration of civic organizations and Spanish-language media conglomerates that included the Mi Familia Vota Education Fund, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, National Council of La Raza (NCLR), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Entravision Communication Corporation, impreMedia LLC, Univision Communications, and approximately 400 local civic organizations.

† 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 American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

centers, applicants received direct support with the naturalization application and were provided legal referrals when necessary for a limited fee of approximately \$30.

In fiscal year 2007, USCIS received almost 1.4 million petitions for naturalization.<sup>6</sup> The tremendous influx of applications overwhelmed the USCIS processing system, causing a significant backlog and longer processing times for many applicants. According to testimony from former USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez, “[h]istorically there have been increases in naturalization filings in advance of fee increases, Presidential elections, immigration debates, and new legislation. Still, none of these past increases compare to the magnitude of the surge we experienced this summer [of 2007].”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the immigration marches and increased outreach undertaken by *ya es hora*, a number of different factors contributed to the surge of naturalization applications in 2007, including the proposed increase to the naturalization application fee and the introduction of a redesigned citizenship exam.<sup>8</sup> While all of these factors played a role in the surge, there has not been a study focusing on the extent to which the *ya es hora* campaign led to measurable increases in the number of naturalizations. The presence of all these variables begs a number of important questions: Which of these factors, or combination of factors, were most salient for the increased rates of naturalization? Moreover, which had the greatest impact on Latinos’ decision to initiate and/or complete the naturalization process? Finally, for those who didn’t complete the process, what were the primary barriers?

In order to examine these questions, this report presents an analysis of aggregate USCIS statistics on the number of naturalizations in the top 50 metropolitan reporting areas for which USCIS gathers data. These data provide an initial assessment of the geographic patterns of change in naturalization rates before and after the immigrant marches in 2006 and the subsequent *ya es hora* efforts.

From this information, we determined if there is a relationship between the increased naturalization rates in metropolitan areas among Latinos and whether these metro areas staged large immigrant marches, had a strong *ya es hora* organizational presence, and/or had a strong Spanish-language media presence. However, the aggregate data only include individuals who were granted U.S. citizenship and fail to include those who have not yet completed the process or were denied U.S. citizenship.

In order to more directly consider the catalysts and barriers faced by individuals who have or have not completed the naturalization process, this report also provides the results of a survey of people who received assistance in the naturalization process from organizations participating in *ya es hora*. These responses provide important insight into the motivating factors that can be credited for increased naturalization rates, voter registration, and voter turnout among Latinos.\* These findings may have strong implications for organizations, partisan and nonpartisan alike, that wish to assist eligible Hispanic residents in the naturalization process. An analysis of increased Latino naturalization in the context of these factors could also have significant implications for electoral participation, particularly considering the concentration of Latinos in large electoral states (New York, California, Texas, Illinois, Florida), as well as key battleground states (New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, and Florida).<sup>9</sup>

## USCIS AGGREGATE STATISTICS: NATURALIZATIONS FROM 2003 TO 2008

We initially examined USCIS data<sup>10</sup> from the top 50 metropolitan statistical areas of naturalizations from 2003 to 2008 and included the top 42 that remained consistently in the top 50 throughout this period. The unit of analysis was the reported number of naturalizations in each metropolitan statistical area.† After standardizing the data collected, we calculated the percent increase of naturalizations for

\* The survey results are based on the responses of participants to questions about their attitudes toward the naturalization process. In order to determine actual naturalization rates, one must examine aggregate data. However, these data would not include all who initiated but failed to complete the process, nor would it include the total number of residents who were eligible to naturalize.

† Aggregate rates of naturalization for these years were obtained from the annual *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. The *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* only reports the number of naturalizations for the top 50 reporting statistical metropolitan areas. Aggregate data collected prior to 2003 was either incomplete or organized in a manner that did not allow for cross-year comparisons.



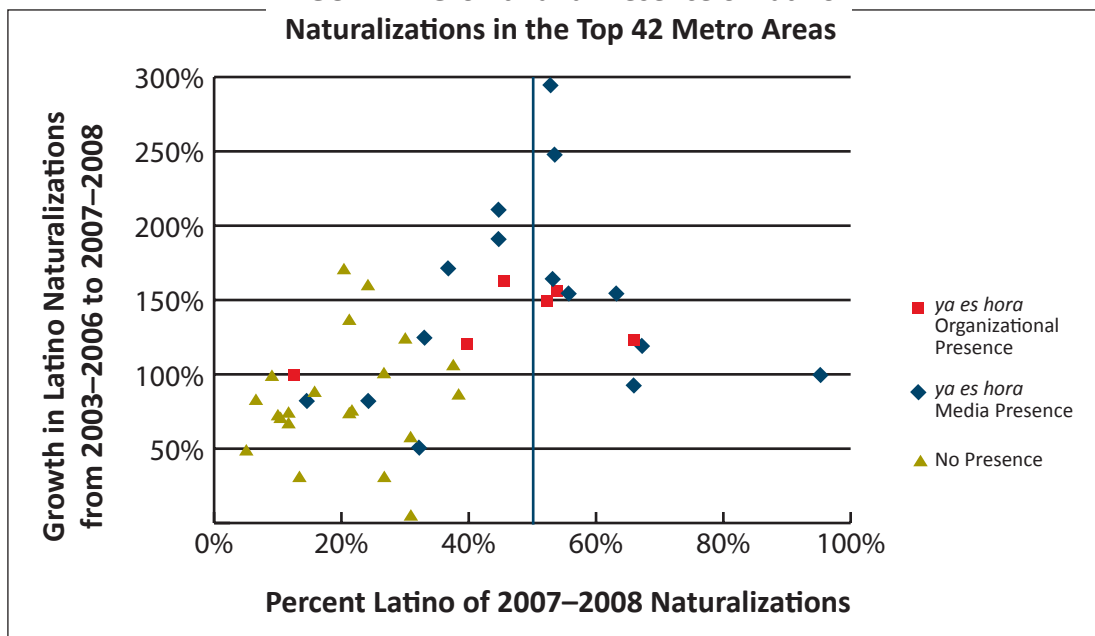


Latinos and non-Latinos. In addition, we calculated the percent Latino composition of the total number of naturalizations in a given year. We compared these two measures for 2003–2006 against the same measures for 2007–2008.\* These comparisons allowed us to identify whether or not there was a noticeable growth in the number of naturalizations for Latinos following the immigration marches of 2006 and the corresponding *ya es hora* campaign. Furthermore, we were able to see if this trend was unique to Hispanics or if it was merely part of a general trend toward increased rates of naturalization across various races and ethnicities.†

After compiling these calculations, we plotted the reporting metropolitan areas onto a graph (see Figure 1). The y-axis displays the level

of growth in Latino naturalizations between 2003–2006 and 2007–2008. The x-axis identifies the percent of Latino naturalizations out of the total number of naturalizations in 2007–2008. We identified each of the reporting metropolitan areas where *ya es hora* had a significant organizational presence and its partners maintained a strong media presence.‡ By classifying the reporting metropolitan areas in this manner, we were able to examine the relative impact that the *ya es hora* campaign had in increasing the rate of Latino naturalizations. In those areas that had a convergence of *ya es hora* organizational and media presence, we determined whether there was a higher growth of Latino naturalizations than in those metropolitan areas where one or both of these factors were not present.

**FIGURE 1: Growth and Presence of Latino Naturalizations in the Top 42 Metro Areas**



**FINDINGS**

- Overall, metropolitan areas that had either *ya es hora* organizational or media presence had consistently higher levels of growth in Latino naturalizations than metropolitan areas with no *ya es hora* presence.
- Metropolitan areas that had a convergence of both *ya es hora* organizational and media presence had higher levels of growth than those with only a media presence.

\* The average naturalization process takes over a year to complete. Since the majority of the marches took place between March 2006 and May 2006, the impact of the marches on completed naturalizations would not be evident until 2007.  
 † Our findings would be enhanced by additional data regarding the total number of Latinos who were eligible for naturalization in each of the years we examined. This would allow us to ensure that a larger percentage of Latinos were pursuing naturalization, as opposed to an ever-growing number of Latinos who have become eligible for naturalization.  
 ‡ The level of organizational and media presence was self-reported by *ya es hora* partnering organizations.

- Between 2003 and 2006, there were only five metropolitan areas where Latinos constituted the majority of those who naturalized. After 2006, however, there were 11 metropolitan areas where Latinos constituted a majority of successful naturalizations.\*
- Of the 42 metropolitan areas that were consistently in the top 50 areas for naturalization, 23 experienced at least 100% growth of the number of yearly Latino naturalized citizens in 2007–2008, as compared to the average number of Latino naturalized citizens in the preceding four years. Only three metropolitan areas witnessed a greater than 55% increase in the average number of non-Latino naturalizations in 2007–2008, as compared to the average in the preceding four years. In no instance did the non-Latino growth reach 100%.
- Of the metropolitan areas with strong *ya es hora* media presence, 70% demonstrated at least 100% growth in the number of yearly Latino naturalized citizens in 2007–2008, as compared to the average number of Latino naturalized citizens in the preceding four years.
- Of the metropolitan areas with strong *ya es hora* media and organizational presence, nearly two-thirds (64%) experienced at least 100% growth in the number of Latino naturalizations and were places where Latinos constituted the majority of all naturalizations.

## YA ES HORA SURVEY

While the aggregate data allowed us to evaluate the impact of the *ya es hora* campaign on the naturalization rates of Latinos, we also sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign’s model through a survey of *ya es hora* participants. The purpose of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the motivating factors that encouraged individuals to apply for citizenship, as well as the barriers that they faced. The survey was administered to 823

Latinos who attended *ya es hora* citizenship workshops or received assistance from one of the *ya es hora* partner organizations. The sample was limited to five regional locations: Northern Virginia, Houston, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles. These areas were selected to provide a reasonable cross-section of the United States and the experiences of *ya es hora* participants. A random sample from the five metropolitan areas was selected and individuals were contacted by phone,<sup>†</sup> which decreased the number of unit and participant nonresponse. The survey was conducted in either English or Spanish, based on the language preference of the participant, and all calls were conducted by a bilingual Latino interviewer.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### Barriers to Naturalization

#### High cost was a significant factor among those who decided to postpone pursuing citizenship.

- Less than one in ten (8%) of those who attended *ya es hora* citizenship workshops or received help at a *ya es hora centro de ciudadanía* decided not to submit the application to USCIS or through a campaign partner (see Figure 2).
- Of those who chose to postpone the application (that is, those who at the time of the survey interview had not submitted their application), a large plurality (43%) indicated that they did so because “the application cost was too great.” Of those respondents, 93% indicated that it was “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that they would apply if loans were available to assist with the application cost.
- One in five (20%) of those who already submitted their application indicated that it was “somewhat unlikely” or “very unlikely” that they would have applied if the fee was more than \$675 (the current cost in 2010).

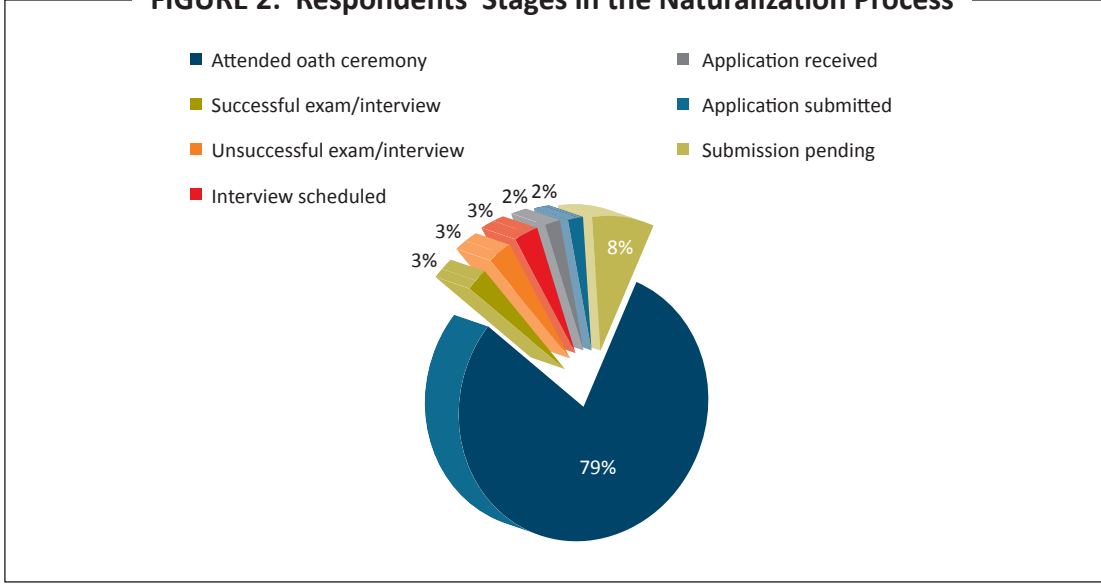
\* Between 2003 and 2008, the metropolitan areas with a majority of Latino naturalizations were El Paso, TX; Miami–Fort Lauderdale–Pompano Beach, FL; San Antonio, TX; Ventura–Oxnard–Thousand Oaks, CA; and Riverside–San Bernardino–Ontario, CA. By 2008, this list also included Fresno, CA; Phoenix–Mesa–Scottsdale, AZ; Los Angeles–Long Beach–Santa Ana, CA; San Diego–Carlsbad–San Marcos, CA; Houston–Sugar Land–Baytown, TX; and Las Vegas–Paradise, NV.

† Individuals who were identified as non-Latino were eliminated from the sample.



- 16% knew someone who had postponed applying for citizenship. Of those, almost half (45%) did so because of the high cost of the application process.
- More than one in four (26%) respondents reported a combined family income of less than \$20,000 per year.
- A majority of respondents (76%) had to save money to be able to afford the fees associated with the naturalization process (88% of those spent one month or more saving; 29% spent six months or more).
- 23% of respondents needed to borrow money from family or friends, or take out a loan to cover the costs of applying.

**FIGURE 2: Respondents' Stages in the Naturalization Process**



**Low levels of English language proficiency continue to be a barrier to citizenship.**

- Among those who did not complete the naturalization process because of an unsuccessful exam or interview, 67% of these individuals cited limited English proficiency as the reason for not completing the process.
- Additionally, among those who decided to postpone the application process, 13% cited limited English skills and the need for English classes as the reason for doing so.
- Of the 16% of respondents who knew someone who postponed applying for citizenship, 29% reported that the reason for doing so was that person's limited English skills.

**Delays associated with the naturalization process proved to be a considerable barrier for those who pursued citizenship.**

- Participants reported the following issues as reasons for delay: general processing (21%), background checks (20%), application materials or information lost by USCIS (15%), biometrics and fingerprinting (14%).

**Motivations for Naturalization**

**Workshops by *ya es hora* significantly increased the number of Latino residents who pursued and were granted citizenship.**

- Of the respondents who completed a *ya es hora* workshop, 92% were first-time applicants for citizenship.

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† 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 American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

- 79% of respondents had been granted citizenship.
- Of those who had been denied citizenship (3%), 95% plan to reapply.
- One in five (20%) respondents said they were “somewhat unlikely” or “very unlikely” to have applied without the assistance provided by *ya es hora*.
- 96% of respondents rated the assistance that they received from *ya es hora* as “excellent,” “very good,” or “good.”

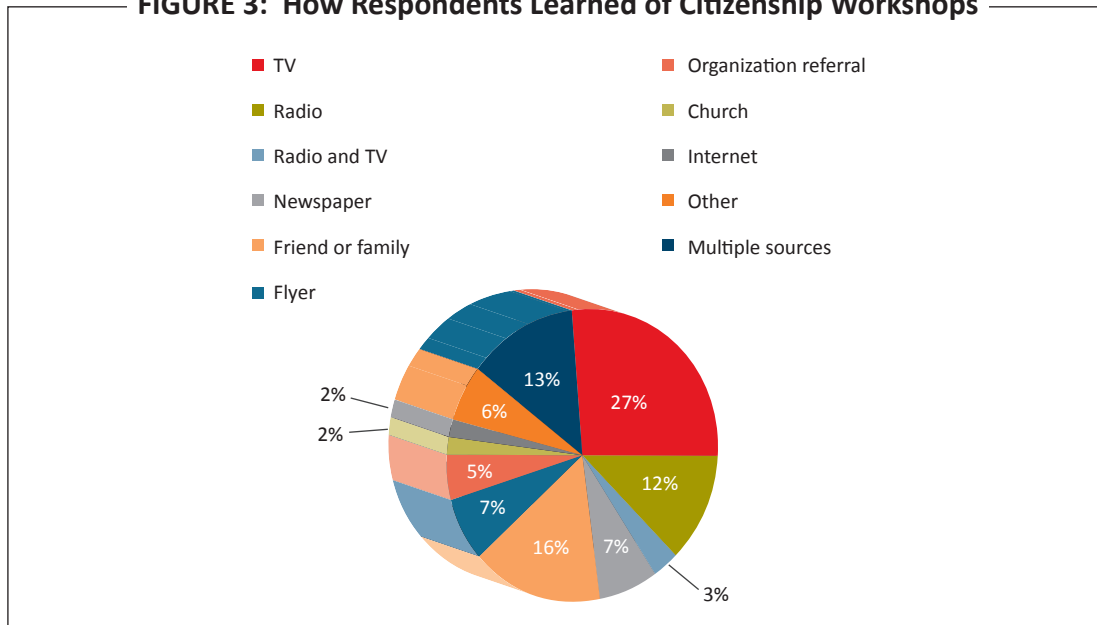
**The partnership with Univision, impreMedia, and Entravision was vital to the success of the *ya es hora* citizenship application workshops.**

- Television, radio, and print media accounted for 49% of the sources of information about the citizenship assistance workshops.

**Friends and family also served as an important source of information regarding the naturalization process.**

- Among respondents, 16% reported family and friends as the source of information about the citizenship workshops (see Figure 3), more than half (57%) of whom had received assistance from a similar workshop.

**FIGURE 3: How Respondents Learned of Citizenship Workshops**





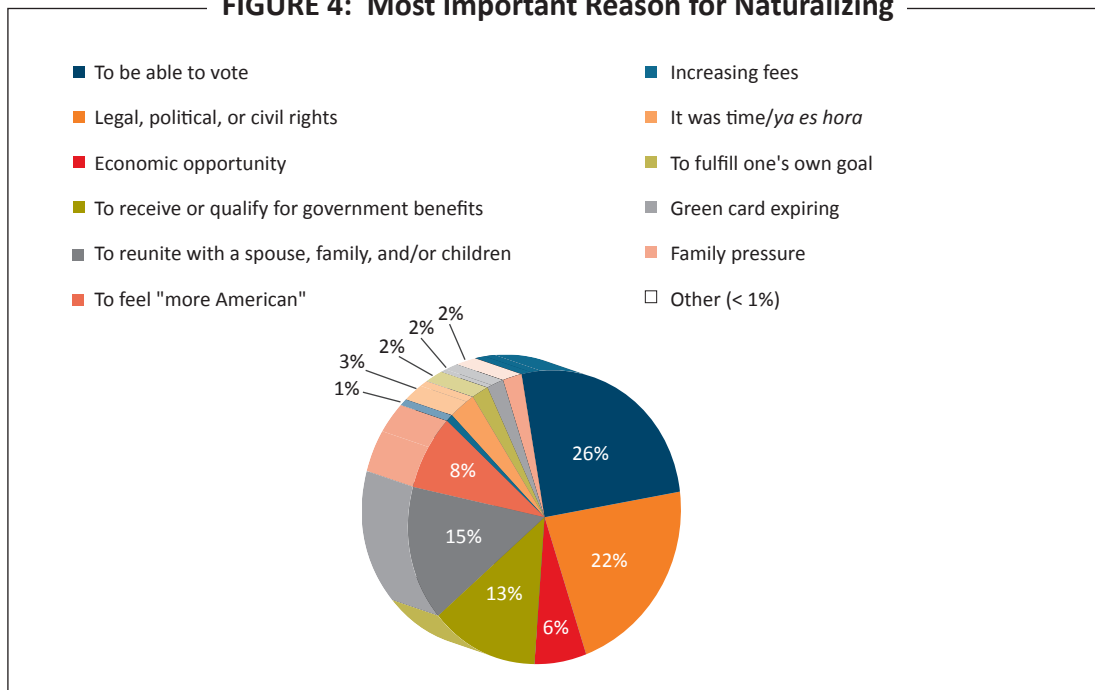
**Legal, political, civil, and voting rights were key motivating factors for those who pursued citizenship.**

- When asked about the most important reason why they applied for citizenship, 26% of respondents indicated that it was “to be able to vote.” When coupled with those who cited “legal, political, or civil rights” as the most important reason (22%), almost half (48%) of the survey respondents sought citizenship because of their desire to defend or exercise their rights (see Figure 4).

**The immigration debate was a particularly salient issue affecting Latino residents’ decision to pursue citizenship.**

- When asked separately about the impact of the immigration debate in their decision to naturalize, nearly half (49%) of respondents noted that the immigration debate was “the main reason” or “an important reason” for naturalizing.

**FIGURE 4: Most Important Reason for Naturalizing**



**Respondents' Experiences**

**Workshop participants were likely to encourage others to pursue naturalization.**

- More than one-third of respondents indicated that a friend or family member has applied for citizenship since they applied.
- 97% of respondents indicated that they were “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to encourage family members or friends to pursue citizenship.
- 57% of respondents were encouraged to pursue naturalization from others who had received assistance from a community-based effort similar to those used by the *ya es hora* model.

**While respondents were more likely to hear about the *ya es hora* workshops from women, gender did not affect their own likelihood of encouraging other family members and friends to pursue citizenship.**

- Respondents were more likely to recall being informed about the workshops from female friends and family by an almost two to one margin.
- Yet among respondents who completed the naturalization process, an equal number of males and females reported that friends or family had initiated the naturalization process after the respondent had initiated the process.
- Moreover, 89.1% of men and 86% of women indicated that they were “very likely” to encourage family or friends to pursue citizenship. An additional 7.2% of men and 10.4% of women indicated that they were “somewhat likely” to do so.

### Political Participation

**Newly naturalized Latino respondents demonstrated a high propensity to vote.**

- 67.2% of those who had been granted citizenship have voted at least once.
- 84.8% of those who had been granted citizenship had registered to vote.

### ANALYSIS

The results of the USCIS aggregate statistics suggest that *ya es hora* played a role, and in some cities a particularly significant one, in increasing Latino naturalizations where the campaign carried out its work. On the whole, areas where *ya es hora* had an organizational and/or media presence experienced higher levels of growth in the number of Latino naturalizations than areas with no campaign activity. The data also yield important information on the two major components of the campaign. Areas where the campaign had

both an organizational and media presence saw higher levels of growth than those with only a media presence. While the involvement and presence of media ensured that Latinos were informed about the naturalization process, this impact was amplified in areas where these efforts were complemented by community-based assistance in filling out the complex citizenship application.

Analysis of USCIS data also revealed an important finding about the percentage of Latino naturalizations among the top metropolitan areas. The number of metropolitan areas where Latinos composed a majority of completed naturalizations jumped from five to 11 between the two periods studied (2003–2006 and 2007–2008). This notable change occurred within two years, showing that the Latino community was highly motivated to pursue naturalization in the aftermath of the 2006 immigration marches and launch of the *ya es hora* campaign. Two-thirds of metropolitan areas with an organizational and media presence by *ya es hora* were places where Latinos constituted the majority of all naturalizations, suggesting that the campaign’s targeted efforts toward the Latino community contributed in part to this change.

More importantly, this finding illustrates the great potential of mobilizing this community not only through unique contextual factors, but also through campaigns such as *ya es hora*, which provide Latinos with essential information and assistance on the naturalization process. The change is notable when considering the implications of this increase on Latino electoral participation. In particular, California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida were states with metropolitan areas where the growth of Latino naturalizations and the Latino share of overall naturalizations were particularly pronounced. All of these states have sizable Latino populations, hold significant electoral influence at the national level, and are places where issues concerning the Latino community are especially salient. With the focus that has been devoted to the political impact of Latinos in recent years, there is no doubt that Latino



voters in each of these states will play a major role in shaping the nature of elections and associated policy outcomes in the future.

While the aggregate data allowed us to isolate the growth and percentage of Latino naturalizations among areas with and without a *ya es hora* presence, the results obtained from the survey of *ya es hora* participants gave a more detailed understanding of the various factors that affect an individual's decision to pursue citizenship and experiences with the naturalization process. From this information, it was clear that some applicants continue to confront challenges on the path to naturalization. While an impressive percentage (79%) of survey respondents had completed the process, high application costs, English proficiency levels, and administrative delays continue to affect applicants' naturalization experiences.

For many applicants, the high application fee continues to be a significant barrier to naturalization. The survey results showed that even individuals who were able to successfully complete the naturalization process had to find outside sources of financial assistance to pay for the process or save money in order to apply. Given the relatively lower incomes of Hispanic immigrants, high application fees have a disproportionately adverse impact on Latino naturalization applicants. The financial hurdles encountered by many immigrants who are eligible for naturalization make it imperative to provide potential applicants with information about the fee waiver process so that citizenship does not remain an impossible goal for those with limited means.\*

Limited English proficiency also proved to be a significant deterrent among the respondents who did not complete the naturalization process and was cited as a major barrier by respondents who acknowledged that they knew someone who had postponed applying for citizenship. The presence of this barrier highlights the significant need to increase resources for English courses and provide support to community-based organizations facing high demands for these services. In a

survey of adult English-as-a-second-language programs, 57.4% of such programs reported that they had a wait list.<sup>11</sup> The incredible demand that exists for adult English classes has forced programs in some states to do away with wait lists altogether and led to a reduction in the quality and availability of these services.<sup>12</sup> Thus, while many immigrants are willing and eager to acquire the skills necessary to pursue naturalization, the lack of institutional support for such development is difficult to find. Inevitably, this barrier stands in the way of many immigrants' aspirations for greater integration into their communities.

Additional support and funding for such programs would ensure that eligible Latino applicants are properly prepared for the naturalization process. While the *ya es hora* campaign is not designed to address this challenge, it is nonetheless important to consider it given its presence in the communities where the campaign carries out its efforts. Finally, the procedural delays encountered by respondents in the survey highlight the continuing need to engage in administrative advocacy to address these inefficiencies and keep applicants informed on the status of their cases.

Despite the fact that these challenges prevented some applicants from applying for citizenship, the outcomes for those who went through with the process were positive. Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents had been granted citizenship when they were interviewed. These statistics reveal that those who received assistance from *ya es hora* were not only highly motivated to pursue citizenship but also experienced high success rates doing so. In addition, the survey results show that the *ya es hora* campaign played a critical role in respondents' experiences and positive outcomes. The fact that 20% of respondents indicated that they were "somewhat unlikely" or "very unlikely" to apply for citizenship without help from *ya es hora* illustrates that the campaign's efforts were essential in ensuring that participants had the necessary resources and assistance to undertake the naturalization

\* The fee waiver process is administered by USCIS. The agency requires applicants to request a fee waiver through an affidavit and provide accompanying documentation of their inability to pay.

process. Survey responses also indicated that the campaign's partnership with media sources was highly effective at providing respondents with information about its work. Furthermore, many individuals were exposed to the campaign through friends and family, additional sources that enabled the campaign to elevate its presence in individual communities.

While *ya es hora* was undoubtedly instrumental in yielding successful results among survey respondents, the immigration debate was another major factor driving their motivation to apply for citizenship. Among survey respondents, 49% cited the immigration debate as "the main reason" or "an important reason" for naturalizing. For these applicants, the high level of activity surrounding immigration impelled them to pursue citizenship, a status that affords them full protections and rights in the United States, which can only be secured by going through the naturalization process. The survey results suggest that while the immigration debate served as a powerful impetus for individuals to naturalize, the *ya es hora* campaign provided many with the information and assistance needed to complete the intimidating process of becoming a citizen. In this respect, the campaign served as a means of enabling respondents to achieve their goal of attaining citizenship.

The survey also revealed important insights about respondents' attitudes toward the political process. Almost half of survey respondents cited greater political, legal, and civil, and voting rights as a major factor in their decision to seek citizenship. Of those who had already obtained citizenship, 67.2% indicated that they had voted at least once, and nearly 85% had registered to vote. The survey results show that for these respondents, the naturalization process was seen as a step toward greater involvement and engagement in the political process.

## CONCLUSION

Our analysis of the aggregate data and survey responses demonstrates that the *ya es hora* campaign positively contributed to the increase of Latino naturalizations following the 2006 immigration marches. While there were a number of factors that contributed to the spike in applications in 2007, *ya es hora* helped to maximize the number of Latinos applying for citizenship and successfully completing the process. While these data do not allow for an analysis of the full scope of factors that affected Latinos' decision to pursue citizenship, the survey results of individuals who participated in *ya es hora* reveal that the campaign was essential to applicants' understanding of and access to the naturalization process. These findings show that through targeted outreach and assistance, Latinos can be motivated to pursue naturalization.

Nonetheless, it is also clear that some potential applicants continue to come across a number of barriers that prevent them from being able to achieve citizenship. An understanding of these challenges is necessary for campaigns like *ya es hora* and supporting efforts to reach eligible applicants for citizenship and provide them with the resources to succeed in the naturalization process. From these results, it is apparent that the desire to pursue citizenship as a means of greater civic involvement and integration into American society is strong among Latinos. For this reason, efforts such as those undertaken by the *ya es hora* campaign will continue to play an important role in shaping the full integration, political influence, and social contributions of Latinos in the United States.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*, H.R. 4437, 109<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess.
- <sup>2</sup> Sylvia R. Lazos, “The Immigrant Rights Marches (Las Marchas): Did the ‘Gigante’ (Giant) Wake Up or Does it Still Sleep Tonight?” *Nevada Law Journal* 7 (November 2007): 780–825.
- <sup>3</sup> Adrián Félix, Carmen González, and Ricardo Ramírez, “Political Protest, Ethnic Media, and Latino Naturalization,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 52 (2008): 618–634.
- <sup>4</sup> Nancy Rytina, *Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2007*. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Washington, DC, 2009.
- <sup>5</sup> Olga Medina and Marisabel Torres, *Citizenship Beyond Reach* (Washington, DC: National Council of La Raza, 2009).
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2008*. Office of Immigration Statistics. Washington, DC, 2009, Table 20.
- <sup>7</sup> Emilio T. Gonzalez, Director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *Naturalization Delays: Causes, Consequences and Solutions*, 110<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 2008.
- <sup>8</sup> Olga Medina and Marisabel Torres, *Citizenship Beyond Reach*.
- <sup>9</sup> Ricardo Ramírez, “Strength in *Numeros?* Political Context, Ethnic Solidarity, and the Political Mobilization of Latino Immigrants in the United States” (unpublished manuscript, presented at Latino Natural Survey Conference, Cornell University, November 1–3, 2007).
- <sup>10</sup> These data came from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* for the years 2003–2008.
- <sup>11</sup> James Thomas Tucker, *The ESL Jogjam: Waiting Times for Adult ESL Classes and the Impact on English Learners* (Los Angeles: NALEO Educational Fund, 2006).
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

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