

# ENGAGING THE LATINO ELECTORATE

By Lindsay Daniels\*

## Overview

Latino<sup>†</sup> voters have increasingly left their mark on the national political landscape, most notably in the last two election cycles. Post-election analysis from November 2010 shows that Latino turnout in several key western states helped Democrats retain control of the Senate.<sup>1</sup> In particular, high Latino turnout in Nevada helped Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid win an election that was too close to call until Election Day. Moreover, in 2008, Latino voters were credited with helping Senator John McCain secure the Republican nomination after giving him a victory in Florida's primary with 54% support.<sup>2</sup> That year, the Latino share of the electorate also grew in unexpected places such as Indiana, North Carolina, and Virginia, helping President Obama carry key battleground states that President Bush won in 2004 with a strong share of Latino support, including Colorado, Florida, New Mexico, and Nevada.<sup>3</sup>

Each year, the Hispanic population—and with it the Hispanic electorate—continues to grow across the nation. Heading into the redistricting process, that growth plays a role both in helping states gain seats and in preventing states that lose seats from experiencing greater losses. In recently released 2010 Census population totals, minorities accounted for roughly 70% of the growth in the U.S. voting-age population in the last decade, with Latinos alone accounting for 40% of that growth. In Texas and California, for example, Hispanics represented more than half of the voting-age population growth.<sup>4</sup> In

2009, Latinos represented 15.8% of the total population, but 22.4% of the population under 18;<sup>5</sup> these youth will be joining the ranks of the electorate and influencing the balance of power in elections for years to come.

To realize that potential, there must be a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to engaging and mobilizing the Latino electorate. Where candidates are concerned, policy positions and presence matter—to generate energy and support, candidates need to address and support the issues that matter to this community and invest in meaningful outreach and communications. In addition, traditional parties and electoral models need to broaden their efforts beyond habitual voters to reach unregistered, new, and infrequent voters, since the majority of Hispanics fall into those segments and therefore receive less contact. Evidence shows that meaningful outreach and investments, combined with effective mobilization models, produce results.

This analysis reviews Latino electoral numbers and potential, looks at communication expenditures aimed at Latinos, examines layered campaign strategies that generated Latino engagement in the last election cycle, and provides examples of promising nonpartisan efforts.

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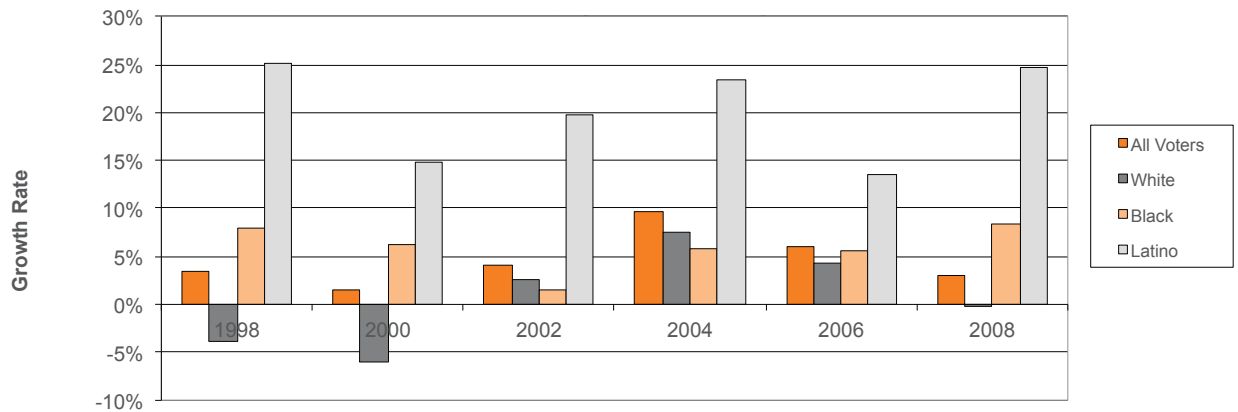
<sup>†</sup> The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

## The Latino Electorate

Hispanic population growth is expected to account for a substantial share of the total U.S. population increase over the last decade once full Census 2010 results are released.<sup>6</sup> More than seven in ten Latinos are U.S. citizens, and for Latinos under 18, that number is nine in ten. A young Latino population, with a median age of 27 compared to 39 for non-Hispanics, is balancing the aging of America as baby boomers enter retirement.

Electurally, Latinos account for the highest voter registration growth rate when compared to other groups (see Figure 1). Between 2002 and 2006, the last midterm elections for which detailed data are available, Latino voter registration grew by 18%, compared with 7% for Whites and 4% for Blacks.

**Figure 1: Voter Registration Growth Rate from Previous Election of Same Type (Presidential or Midterm) by Race/Ethnicity, 1998–2008**



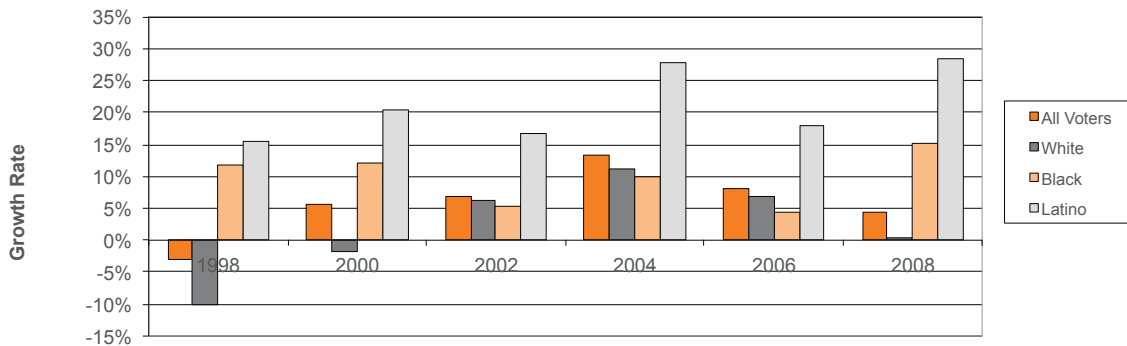
Note: The rate of growth, calculated by NCLR, is based on the previous election type (midterm to midterm, presidential to presidential).

Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008," *Current Population Survey*, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html> (accessed February 10, 2011), Table 4a.

In addition, Latinos showed the largest increase in voter turnout rates over the past six elections (see Figure 2). In the 2008 presidential election alone,

Latino voting participation grew by 28.4% from 2004 levels, compared to 0.5% for Whites and 15.1% for Blacks.

**Figure 2: Voter Growth Rate from Previous Election of Same Type (Presidential or Midterm) by Race/Ethnicity, 1998–2008**



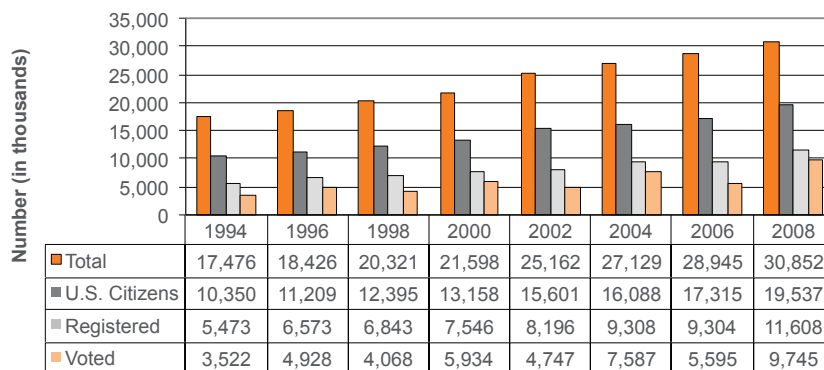
Note: The rate of growth, calculated by NCLR, is based on the previous election type (midterm to midterm, presidential to presidential).

Source: NCLR calculation using U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008," *Current Population Survey*, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html> (accessed February 10, 2011), Table 4a.

However, there are noticeable gaps between the number of Latinos who are eligible to vote and those who are actually registering and voting. For example, in the last presidential election, when

a record 9.7 million Latinos voted, there were 9.8 million Latino citizens of voting age who did not participate; 2.9 million of them were already registered (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Latino Population of Voting Age, 1994–2008**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008," *Current Population Survey*, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html> (accessed February 10, 2011), Table 4a.

This means that the potential for Hispanic participation is even greater, particularly when taking into account the following:

- **Future voters.** More than one-third of the Hispanic population is currently under the age of 18 and thus not eligible to vote (compared to 21% of the non-Hispanic population). However, 93% of Latinos under age 18 are U.S. citizens, and each year 500,000 turn of voting age.<sup>7</sup>
- **Citizenship-eligible immigrants.** Although 24% of Latinos, or 11.5 million, are adult immigrants not yet eligible to vote, it is estimated that more than four million of them are currently eligible to apply for citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

In 2008, Latinos composed 15.4% of the total population but only 7.4% of the electorate. In order to realize the tremendous potential of the

Latino electorate, significant interventions are needed to assist eligible immigrants in navigating the naturalization process, register and integrate young Latinos into the voting process, and energize infrequent Hispanic voters. If Latino electoral participation in presidential elections continues its growth pattern and naturalization rates and mobilization efforts continue at corresponding levels, as many as 1.3 million additional Hispanics will vote in 2012. In addition, if the Latino electorate closes the gap with the next largest racial/ethnic voter segment—African Americans—by half, that number could be even greater. Aided by serious investments and strategies from candidates, parties, philanthropy, nonpartisan groups, and others, there is the potential for nearly three million more Hispanic voters to cast their ballots in the 2012 election (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Latino Voters in the 2012 Election**

	Latino Citizens of Voting Age	Registered Latino Voters	Latino Voters
2008 Actual	19,537,000	11,608,000	9,745,000
2012 Projected	22,214,000	13,195,000	11,085,000
2012 Potential	22,214,000	14,339,000	12,729,000

*Note:* These calculations are similar to those made by NCLR in previous reports on the Latino electorate. These are simple straight-line calculations based on comparisons with previous years. Calculations were made as follows: The 2012 numbers were estimated by multiplying the 2008 Latino voting age population (VAP) by its rate of growth between 2004 and 2008. That percentage was then multiplied by the 2008 citizen voting-age population (CVAP) to arrive at the Latino CVAP for 2012. Projected registration and voting numbers for 2012 were then calculated by multiplying the 2012 CVAP by the rate of 2008 Latino voter registration and voting.

## Campaigns and the Latino Electorate

Although Latinos have observed the largest voter registration and turnout growth rates over the past several election cycles, traditional candidate and political party voter mobilization efforts have been slow to produce electorate expansion commensurate with the growth of the Latino population. The resources spent on mobilizing the Hispanic electorate are modest compared to the investments made in other voter segments, and many political campaigns and advisors lack substantial experience working with Latino communities. An effective effort to energize and mobilize Hispanic voters requires a comprehensive campaign that not only invests resources but does so in a culturally competent way.

Key factors in creating a culturally competent campaign include a plan with strategies that reflect the electorate’s characteristics and the ability to recruit and deploy trusted messengers. Traditional campaign models tend to focus on frequent voters who have a more reliable voting history and are easier to reach, but this strategy misses many Latinos who lack a voting history—young voters, newly registered voters, and new citizens—as well as infrequent Hispanic voters who are registered but do not vote regularly. Failure to develop a campaign plan that incorporates these important segments of the Latino electorate often results in poor candidate outreach and visibility. Similarly, the parties are not necessarily filling that gap. In a 2006 poll, only 38% of Latino voters report being contacted by the Democratic Party about the election, and only 29% by the Republican Party.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, a February 2011 poll notes that only 52% of Latino voters feel that the Democratic Party is doing a good job of reaching out to Hispanics, and a mere 18% say that the Republican Party is doing a good job.<sup>10</sup> With anti-Latino sentiment on the rise and the FBI reporting a spike in hate crimes against this community,<sup>11</sup> candidates and parties need to deepen relationships and work with community leaders who are recognized as trusted sources of information and can assist in developing effective outreach.

Equally as important as who delivers the message is the substance of that message. When outreach to Hispanics actually takes place, many political messengers rely on using or translating general campaign messages without finding out what resonates with Hispanic voters. Indeed, education, jobs, and the economy—issues that *all* Americans care deeply about—have traditionally topped the list of Hispanic priorities. However, the aspects of these issues that Latinos care about are not typically used as the campaigns’ top-line messages, and thus candidates consequently fail to connect with the Latino community or convey how their policies will improve their lives. Additionally, several polls in 2010 show that immigration is climbing higher as a Latino priority, due in large part to federal inaction on immigration reform and a spate of anti-immigrant measures such as Arizona SB 1070, a law that legitimizes racial profiling as a local law enforcement practice.<sup>12</sup> Latinos support a workable and humane approach to the issue, and immigration has come to serve as a lens through which Latinos assess candidates’ attitudes toward

their community. Yet many candidates fail to have a sophisticated approach to the issue, opting to avoid or demonize it.

Candidates and parties also struggle with the medium for delivering their messages. Although polling consistently shows that Latino voters get their information equally from English- and Spanish-language news outlets,<sup>13</sup> parties and candidates have been slow to make investments that reflect this reality. When deliberate communications to the Latino electorate are pursued, they are often in the form of Spanish-language outreach alone, missing a significant segment of Hispanic voters. However, as these expenditures currently provide the best measure of outreach to the Latino electorate, comparing them to English-language advertisement investments offers insight into how candidates and parties prioritize their campaign spending. In the 2008 presidential campaign, just over \$4 million was spent by the two candidates and the two national parties to broadcast 14 Spanish-language ads from April to November, compared to over \$394 million spent on English-language ads in the same period (see Table 2).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, although the 2010 midterm election was a record year in campaign expenditures, not much of it went to Spanish-language outlets. According to the Republican National Committee’s Manny Rosales, the national party did not pay for *any* Spanish-language media in the 2010 cycle, and the Democratic National Committee spent only \$1 million.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 2. Advertisement Spending on the 2008 Presidential Election**

	Barack Obama	John McCain	Democratic National Committee	Republican National Committee	TOTAL
Amount spent on Spanish-language TV advertising	\$2,388,429	\$1,276,427	\$0	\$0	<b>\$4,039,340</b>
Total spent on all TV advertising	\$235,974,838	\$125,530,148	\$623,597	\$36,398,310	<b>\$398,526,893</b>
Percent of total spending on Spanish-language advertisements	1.0%	1.0%	0%	0%	<b>1.0%</b>

Source: Andrei Scheinkman et al., “The Ad Wars,” *The New York Times*, <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/advertising/index.html> (accessed February 4, 2011).

## The Case for Investment

Although traditional campaigns under-invest in reaching out to Latino voters, evidence shows that when investments are complemented with efforts to meaningfully connect on the issues, they pay off. Though still not proportionate to the expenditures to mobilize other voter segments, one example is the 2008 election, which saw a higher level of spending on Latino-focused advertising and mobilization efforts than in previous years. Particularly in the Southwest, the resources targeting the Latino electorate had a big impact in the presidential race. The Democratic National Committee and President Obama invested an unprecedented \$20 million in Hispanic outreach, which helped garner Latino support and electoral votes in battleground states such as Colorado, Florida, Nevada, and New Mexico.<sup>16</sup>

In the 2010 midterm election, the spending of candidates, parties, and outside interest groups made it the most expensive election year in history. In contrast to previous election years, states that typically have not had competitive races—such as California, Illinois, and Nevada—received higher investments targeted toward the Latino electorate. It should be noted that there have been a number of important nonpartisan efforts to bring Latinos into the electorate and the voting booth, and those continued in 2010 as well. The case studies below, though partisan in nature, show what significant investments can achieve when combining a candidate's ability to energize Latino voters with a multifaceted campaign to mobilize them—strategies also used by George W. Bush in both of his presidential runs.

### *Case Study: Jerry Brown vs. Meg Whitman for California Governor*

In California, a record 22% of the state's voters were Latino in 2010. GOP gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman, who noted Schwarzenegger's path to victory in 2006, came with 39% of the Latino vote, and after winning her party's primary she focused on making early inroads with Hispanic voters.<sup>17</sup> The first full interview she gave was to Spanish-language outlet Univision, and early on she coordinated weekly Latino-focused events and ran Spanish-language ads on Univision and Telemundo. The strategy was paying off when in mid-September *The Field Poll* showed that Whitman was only three points down in Latino support—40% to Brown's 43%.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Democrat Jerry Brown's outreach to Latinos was seen as lackluster. However, early endorsements from several outside groups that were planning large-scale Latino voter mobilization aided Brown's campaign. Most notable was the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which organized a \$5 million independent expenditure campaign called *Cambiando California*.<sup>19</sup> The campaign targeted communication toward Latino households, including more than 2.1 million pieces of mail and several hundred canvassers working for two months. According to a survey by David Binder Research, 25% of Latinos said that they were contacted by phone by someone supporting Jerry Brown, compared to 20% of White voters.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of the day, Whitman failed to connect with Hispanics on the issues and committed a series of missteps that were not well received by Latino voters. It was not lost on Hispanic voters that Whitman took a harder line on immigration in English-language ads than in Spanish-language ads, and she also suffered from her handling of a situation involving her undocumented Latina housekeeper. SEIU's heavy investment to mobilize Latino voters combined with Whitman's missteps resulted in a dramatic shift in Latino support: Brown's support among Latino voters had more than tripled by mid-October, when another *Field Poll* showed a 29% lead.<sup>21</sup> Finally, election-eve polls confirmed the full scale of the swing in Latino support, with 64% voting for Brown compared to 31% for Whitman.

### *Case Study: Harry Reid vs. Sharron Angle for Nevada Senator*

In Nevada, Democratic Senator Harry Reid held on to a Senate seat that many polling and political outlets had predicted he would lose to strong challenger and former Republican Assemblywoman Sharron Angle. The ability to connect with and mobilize Latino voters was a determining factor in Reid's victory.<sup>22</sup> According to exit polls, Latinos accounted for 16% of all Nevada voters in the 2010 midterm election, up from 12% in 2006, and an overwhelming majority (69%) voted for Reid. (It should be noted that a Latino Decisions election-eve poll of likely Hispanic voters showed Reid's support at 90%,<sup>23</sup> raising valid questions about the effectiveness of current polling methodologies in measuring Latino candidate support.<sup>24</sup>) Even at 69%, this is one of the highest levels of support that any senatorial candidate received from the Latino electorate this election cycle, second only to Hispanic voter support for New York's senators.

Nevada saw important, nonpartisan, Latino-focused registration and mobilization efforts, including those by The Hispanic Institute and Democracia U.S.A.—which collectively registered 16,932 new Hispanic voters—and by efforts from several unions, as also seen in California. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union and the Culinary Workers Union, which represent most of the card dealers, bellhops, and other casino workers on the Las Vegas strip, were part of a coordinated campaign, including door-to-door canvassing and direct mail to their membership, which includes Latinos.<sup>25</sup>

Notably, Reid’s campaign mounted a significant outreach effort to connect with Latino voters. In a contest laced with anti-immigrant and race-baiting messages from the Angle campaign, Reid did not shy away from his record as an outspoken champion of sensible immigration proposals that the Latino community supports, instead reasserting his positions and calling out his opponent. During the summer, he announced a new initiative to partner with local radio station KRVL to broadcast English lessons to its Latino audience three times a week.<sup>26</sup> Reid has also developed strong relationships with Hispanic-focused print media outlets in Nevada, winning an endorsement from *Prensa Latina*, the first in the newspaper’s history. Angle, on the other hand, refused to meet with the editor and staff of *El Tiempo Las Vegas* to discuss her views,<sup>27</sup> and she alienated and angered the Latino community with her campaign ads.

## Successful Nonpartisan Approaches

The combination of meaningful issue positions, outreach, and investment by candidates and parties has generated an increase in Latino electoral participation, and both parties have a vested interest in cultivating that approach. The objective of traditional campaigns is to reach 51%, but with increasingly tight margins of victory, campaigns may need to expand the pool of voters in search of additional support. Since traditional campaigns

tend to ramp up for only a few months every four years, with a focus on frequent voters, they may miss several rich sources of Latino electoral growth: citizen youth turning 18, U.S. citizenship-eligible immigrants, and infrequent voters with limited voter history.

In addition to doing a better job at reaching Hispanics, a comprehensive Latino electoral growth strategy calls for interventions that engage these segments of the population, particularly since some of these have to take place beyond the election calendar. Across the country—at the local, state, and national levels—a variety of organizations have coordinated outreach and mobilization campaigns in Hispanic communities, and several promising models are emerging, from more labor-intensive, door-to-door canvassing and training, to online efforts targeting youth, to media campaigns encouraging participation. Among them is the *ya es hora ¡VE Y VOTA!* campaign,\* which assists thousands of voters every election cycle via a bilingual, toll-free hotline that serves as a resource for nearly all nonpartisan outreach efforts in the Latino community. In addition to *ya es hora*, there are a number of extensive nonprofit efforts targeting Hispanic voters, and the three models profiled below are the ones that NCLR has had the most experience with: the state-level One Arizona coalition, which came together in Arizona during the 2010 election; Democracia U.S.A. (DUSA), which had operations in seven states last year; and NCLR’s Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project (LEAP), which worked to build the civic engagement capacity of community-based service-provider organizations.

### One Arizona

The nonpartisan One Arizona coalition led a multilayered voter registration, permanent early voting list (PEVL) conversion, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) campaign that targeted Arizona’s infrequent Latino voters during the 2010 midterm election. One Arizona was composed of organizations that are well known within the state for their labor, civil rights, organizing, and civic

\* *Ya es hora ¡VE Y VOTA!* is a partnership between national, state, and local community organizations and Spanish-language TV, radio, and print media. Its national coordinating partners are the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund (NALEO), Mi Familia Vota, NCLR, Entravision Communications Corporation, impreMedia, and Univision Communications Inc. NALEO staffs the national bilingual hotline.

† The organizations that were members of the One Arizona coalition include Arizona Center for Empowerment, Border Action Network, CASE, Democracia U.S.A., Mi Familia Vota Education Fund, Protecting Arizona Family Coalition (PAFCO), Promise Arizona (PAZ), Puente, Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, and Arizona Advocacy Network Foundation.

work<sup>†</sup> and included trusted leaders in the Latino community. The groups chose to combine efforts, resources, expertise, and information to sustain and build Latino turnout in an election where many expected that Latinos would stay home in response to the state’s strained political environment. Earlier in the year, passage of the draconian SB 1070—a law that Latinos saw as anti-Hispanic<sup>28</sup>—and projected electoral victories by its supporters were seen as potential turnout depressors.

One Arizona spent just over \$900,000 on its campaign, and preliminary results show that the coalition registered 20,468 voters, converted 42,104 voters to PEVLs, and canvassed 62,048 households in a final one-week push to get voters to the polls. In the two weeks prior to the election, each voter on the coalition’s GOTV target list received as many as 11 contacts through a combination of phone banking, mail, and door-to-door canvassing. The One Arizona campaign plan also integrated strategic communications such as newspaper ads, a Spanish-language voter guide explaining various ballot propositions, daily four-minute “featurettes” on Univision that discussed voting and demonstrated how to sign up for the PEVL list, and public service announcements targeting young Latino voters that aired on two of Arizona’s popular FM radio stations.\*

An estimated 206,000 Latinos turned out on Election Day, 38,000 more than in 2006.<sup>29</sup> Although that turnout number was less than what the coalition had set out to achieve, the accomplishment is significant given the absence of statewide competitive races, a severe lack of Latino outreach resources from national parties, and generally lackluster candidate campaigns—not to mention added restrictions on voter registration as a result of voter identification laws. The One Arizona campaign was also noteworthy because it emphasized adding infrequent Latino voters to the early voting list, a strategy that is worth tracking in order to assess its potential to increase Hispanic participation patterns.

**Democracia U.S.A.**

A nonpartisan model that has achieved larger- scale registration and turnout success is Florida-based Democracia U.S.A.<sup>†</sup> DUSA’s approach starts by being grounded in the communities

where operations take place and recruiting and training paid canvassers and volunteers from the community. These local leaders learn not only about the mechanics of voter registration and turnout operations but also about community issues. They are then equipped to engage potential registrants in discussions about the public issues at stake for their communities and mobilize those voters to turn out on Election Day.

While some have questioned whether nonprofit organizations can effectively register large numbers of voters, and others wonder about how successful they can be in Latino communities, DUSA, by using the right methods and messengers, has produced measurable results (see Table 3). The DUSA canvassing model employs primarily bilingual local leaders in the communities where they operate and puts an emphasis on building personal relationships and face-to-face interaction. In 2010, DUSA had a presence in seven states, registering over 102,000 voters and reaching 55,741 voters during GOTV phone-banking and door canvassing efforts. Registration totals in the seven locations include 4,659 in Arizona, 5,412 in Colorado, 52,291 in Florida, 6,932 in Nevada, 4,642 in New Jersey, 18,381 in Pennsylvania, and 10,218 in Texas.

**Table 3. Democracia U.S.A. Voter Registration by Year**

Election Year	Voters Registered
2004	72,000
2006	104,848
2008	137,540
2010	102,561

Not surprisingly, given the nature of this model, the bulk of voter registration activity comes from Florida, where DUSA has a longer history and more established relationships. Through an off-cycle Leadership Academy program, DUSA has worked to strengthen its local presence at other sites by continuing to develop canvassers to become advocates and leaders in their communities. One of the challenges in building on DUSA’s voter engagement success is the ability to obtain off-cycle investments that strengthen its organizational presence so that these communities do not start from scratch each election cycle. This is an ongoing challenge for voter mobilization operations and

\* In addition to nonpartisan communications efforts, the New Democrat Network had a \$150,000 Spanish-language ad buy.

† Democracia U.S.A. is a project of NCLR, and NCLR is the fiduciary agent of the Democracia Inc. 501(c)(4) project.



for expanding the Latino electorate. To achieve continuity, alternatives include partnerships that leverage the presence of trained canvassers in other activities, such as citizenship assistance or issue advocacy campaigns.

*NCLR Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project*

LEAP is a nonpartisan capacity-building model that works with members of the NCLR Affiliate Network to register and mobilize the Latino communities that they serve. These community-based organizations include a mix of service providers, advocacy programs, and training programs, and they are familiar with the concerns and issues affecting their constituents. They are involved in developing and implementing a variety of programs and services that reach a significant number of Latinos nationwide. Generally, most of these organizations had not been involved in voter registration activities until becoming partners in LEAP. Through the program, partners receive financial and technical support from NCLR to develop civic engagement plans that will

motivate their clients to register and vote, as well as infrastructure support to assist them in tracking and documenting their activities and outcomes. NCLR complements this work on the ground with research that promotes a broader understanding of the Latino electorate—the issues Hispanics care about, what motivates them to go to the polls, and what candidates they support and why.

LEAP partners consist largely of community-based organizations that offer registration opportunities to their eligible constituents when they come for information, referrals, and services. Although modest in scope, this model has produced positive, cost-effective results (see Table 4). With a budget of approximately \$500,000, 22 LEAP groups in 12 states registered 20,059 voters in 2010 and reached 55,757 voters through GOTV operations that consisted of phone banking, direct mail, and bilingual voter protection information. To build more energy around the effort, NCLR launched a “Vote for Respect” campaign that featured video public service announcements and an exclusive song recorded by Grammy Award–winning band Ozomatli.

**Table 4. LEAP Voter Registration Results by Year**

Election Year	Number of Partner Organizations	Number of Returning Partners	Actual Voters Registered	GOTV Universe
2002	4	N/A	N/A	120,000
2004	8	2	7,425	70,000
2006	16	5	8,509	30,400
2008	28	8	25,247	60,000
2010	22	9	20,059	55,757

Models like the three described here provide alternatives to the traditional candidate and party campaigns, which are more cyclical in nature and tend to infuse large amounts of money for very short periods of time. These models build upon

organizations that have a long-standing presence in their communities outside of the election cycle, providing an opportunity to reach people who might not otherwise receive information about registration and voting.

## Conclusion

Over the last decade, Latino voters were often referred to as the “sleeping giant” of American politics, poised to exert influence but not yet awakened to their electoral potential. After the level of Hispanic voter participation in the 2008 and 2010 elections, the size and potential of the Latino electorate is no longer in question—9.7 million Hispanics voted in 2008, composing 7.4% of all votes cast and proving to be a crucial constituency in southwestern battleground states.

What remains to be seen, however, is whether the necessary work and investments will be made to ensure that the full potential of the Latino vote is realized. Closing the current gaps in Latino participation could result in nearly three million new Latino voters in the 2012 election, a feat that will not be easy to achieve. As this analysis shows, large groups of Latinos are eligible but not yet participating in the electoral process, including those who are registered but not voting, those who are eligible for U.S. citizenship but not yet naturalized, young people turning 18, and infrequent voters. Meaningful outreach to these potential voter pools would be difficult for any single entity, which is why a multilayered strategy is needed. The case studies and nonpartisan programs discussed here demonstrate how a comprehensive approach involving a variety of political, nonpartisan, and philanthropic actors produces positive outcomes. To energize and engage the Hispanic electorate, the following elements are critical to success:

- **Issue awareness.** Latino voters have proven to be an engaged electorate, looking for candidates who understand the issues that are important to the Latino community and judging those candidates by their positions on those issues.
- **Effective outreach.** Candidates, parties, and outside interest groups need effective, culturally competent outreach to Latino voters. This includes strategies that take into account the large percentage of Hispanic voters who are unregistered, first-time registrants, newly naturalized, and infrequent voters with limited voting history.
- **Serious investment.** Significant resources are required from multiple sectors—candidates, political parties, philanthropy, and nonprofit organizations—that invest in Hispanic-focused approaches.
- **Long-term infrastructure.** Sustained nonpartisan approaches from community-based organizations and similar players are needed year-round to energize infrequent voters, help eligible citizens become part of the voting pool, and explore innovative strategies to mobilize Latino youth.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ben Smith, “Hispanics Saved the Dems [CORRECTED],” *POLITICO*, November 3, 2010, [http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1110/Hispanics\\_saved\\_the\\_Dems.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1110/Hispanics_saved_the_Dems.html) (accessed February 3, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> Kathy Kiely, “Hispanic Vote ‘Up For Grabs,’ Could Swing Election Outcome,” *USA Today*, June 27, 2008, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-06-26-Hispanics\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/election2008/2008-06-26-Hispanics_N.htm) (accessed February 3, 2011); and Michael Cooper and Megan Thee, “McCain Defeats Romney in Florida Vote,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/us/politics/30florida.html?ref=politics> (accessed February 3, 2011).
- <sup>3</sup> Julia Preston, “In Big Shift, Latino Vote Was Heavily For Obama,” *New York Times*, November 6, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/us/politics/07latino.html> (accessed February 3, 2011).
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