

# THE LATINO ELECTORATE: LATINO VOTERS WANT ACTION ON IMMIGRATION



The number of Latinos who are registered and voting has more than doubled in the past 20 years and is expected to grow by nearly 18% in 2014 compared to the last midterm election. This double-digit growth will continue over the next decade and beyond and is occurring not only in states traditionally associated with Latino populations, but nationwide. Between 2000 and 2010, states in the Midwest experienced the highest growth rate in the Hispanic citizen voting-age population, followed by the Northeast, the South, and the West.

Latino voters are a growing political force in the electoral landscape and immigration is a galvanizing issue for them. As with most Americans, the economy and education continually top the list of issue priorities for this community. But immigration is a personal issue; Latino voters see it as a proxy for how politicians and elected officials regard their community overall. The reason for this is twofold: when the immigration debate gets toxic, Latinos experience a heightened level of harassment, regardless of immigration status, and Latino citizens, most of whom know an undocumented immigrant, experience increased fear that a family member or close friend could be deported. They see their parents or grandparents in the faces of hardworking immigrants hoping to make a better life for their children.

So when a member of Congress uses undocumented immigrants as punching bags for all of the ills of society, the Latino community notices. Rhetoric that paints immigrants as agents of disease, job stealers, or invaders, as recently witnessed in the debate about child refugees from Latin America, offends all Latinos, not just those without legal status. When a politician uses the immigration issue to divide Americans, it actually unites Latinos.

In fact, Latinos are overwhelmingly unified in their support for a functioning immigration system that fosters legal immigration, sensible enforcement, and family unity and creates a way for folks who are not here legally—the majority of whom have lived here for more than

Number of Latinos in the U.S.

**54 million**

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Percent of Latinos who are U.S. citizens

**74%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau,  
calculations by [NCLR](#)

Percent of Latinos under 18  
who are U.S. citizens

**93%**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau,  
calculations by [NCLR](#)

10 years—to come forward, go through the proper checks, and earn legalization and eventually citizenship. The community has experienced a crisis as the number of deportations has dramatically increased over the past several years, tearing families apart and ending with children placed in foster care, while Washington did very little to reform immigration for the long term. It is House Republicans' refusal to act, even with majority support from the American public to do so, that has placed a premium on the need for the president to use his legitimate executive authority to bring some relief to the situation while Congress gets to the business of legislating on the issue.

What impact has inaction on immigration reform had on Latino voters, the fastest-growing segment of the electorate? A poll found that 54% of Latino voters would have a much less favorable opinion, and 20% would have a somewhat less favorable opinion, of House Republicans if Speaker John Boehner did not have a vote on immigration reform legislation. Dissatisfaction over a lack of progress on immigration is not limited to House Republicans, though. A recent [Gallup poll](#) found that President Obama's approval rating has dropped much more among Latinos than among the general population. Since the president's delay on taking action on immigration, his approval rating has dropped even more.

Another [poll](#) found that potential Republican candidates for president in 2016 stand to gain if their party helps to pass immigration reform. But if Republicans in Congress block immigration reform efforts, the GOP could actually do worse among Latino voters than Mitt Romney did in 2012.

Overall, Latino voters remain concerned that neither political party is concerned with their best interests. Many warn that neither party should take the Latino vote for granted.

## Republican Leaders Take Notice of the Growing Latino Electorate

"If the GOP leaves nonwhite voters to the Democrats, then its margins in safe congressional districts and red states will dwindle—not overnight, but over years and decades. For example, the Hispanic population in Georgia's Gwinnett County increased by 153% from 2000 to 2010, while the GOP's presidential vote in the county dropped to 54% in 2012 from 63.7% in 2000. In Henry County, south of Atlanta, the Hispanic population increased by 339% over the same decade. The GOP's presidential vote dropped to 51.2% in 2012 from 66.4% in 2000. Republicans ignore changes like these at their peril."

—Karl Rove, Republican Political Consultant and Former Senior Advisor to President George W. Bush, [Wall Street Journal](#), June 27, 2013

"Look at the last election. We are losing dramatically the Hispanic vote, which we think should be ours, for a variety of reasons, and we've got to understand that. We can't go on forever with 11 million people living in this country in the shadows in an illegal status. We cannot forever have children who were born here—who were brought here by their parents when they were small children to live in the shadows, as well."

—Senator John McCain (R-AZ), [ABC This Week](#) January 27, 2013

"If the president is the leader who legalized immigrants, then 2016 will pretty much be locked up for Democrats. That said, it's not impossible for Republicans to overcome. The strategy for Republicans will have to be to go ahead and risk upsetting the radical right in order to win the bigger prize of inclusion."

—Lionel Sosa, a Republican strategist on Latino issues and former adviser to President Ronald Reagan, [U.S. News](#), September 8, 2014

## The Stats

- Sixty-two percent of Latino voters know someone who is undocumented. Source: [Latino Decisions](#)
- Forty-six percent of Hispanic citizens worry that a family member or close friend could be deported. Source: [Pew Research](#)
- Eighty-nine percent of Latinos support a pathway to citizenship. Seventy-nine percent of Latinos believe that the U.S. economy will be strengthened if undocumented immigrants gain legal status. Source: [Pew Research](#)
- Sixty percent of Latino voters believe that the Republican Party has little or no respect for Hispanics. Sixty-one percent of Latino voters don't believe the GOP cares about people like them. Source: [Latino Decisions](#)

## Why Care About the Latino Vote?

Currently, Latino voters make up 11.3% of the general voting population, but have a more significant influence on elections in key states such as California, New York, Florida, and Illinois, according to [Pew Hispanic](#). Even in states where the Latino electorate is small, it is still significant enough to play a role in close elections. For example, in 2008, Latino voter participation was greater than the presidential margin of victory in Indiana and North Carolina. In 2014, with razor-thin margins in a number of battleground states, including North Carolina, Colorado, and Kansas, meaningful outreach to this community would be a smart strategy, though it is still not the norm. (Sixty-seven percent of Latinos report neither party communicating with them according to polling by [Latino Decisions](#).) Experts project that the Latino vote will be extremely important in key states in the 2016 presidential election, such as Florida, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Ohio, and Colorado.

Latino voters have shown a strong tendency to split the ticket—voting for the candidate of one party in one race and for a candidate of a different party in a different race, in the same election. [Half of Latinos](#) say they have voted for a Republican at some point. Nationally, the high-water mark of that support was 2004, when [George W. Bush garnered 40% of the Latino vote](#). But that tendency has faded since 2006, as the Republican Party was seen as embracing anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. While some may argue that, given redistricting, Republicans would still be able to hold onto a House majority, the reality is that no party aspires to be relegated to one chamber, let alone be shut out of the White House.

Moreover, the Latino vote will continue growing nationally. In 2012, 80% of Latino voters were concentrated in nine states. In order of the number of Latino votes cast, these were California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, New Jersey, New Mexico, Illinois, and Colorado. Significantly, the fastest growth in Latino voters was seen in states like Massachusetts, Utah, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oregon, Virginia, Arizona, and Indiana, forecasting the growing importance of this electorate in states not often associated with the Latino vote. Between 1994 and 2010, the number of Latinos registered doubled, and the number of Latinos who voted grew by 89%. By comparison, in that period, the number of Blacks who voted grew by 23% and the number of Whites who voted grew by 6.5%.

## The Stats

- An average of 74,767 Latino U.S. citizens turn 18 every month. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, calculations by [NCLR](#)
- An average of 900,000 Latino U.S. citizens will turn 18 every year between now and 2028. This translates to approximately 2,465 a day and more than 12 million new potential voters by 2028. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, calculations by [NCLR](#)

- In 2011, Latino children represented nearly one-quarter of all children in the United States. The overwhelming majority of them (92.7%) are U.S. citizens.  
Source: [Pew Hispanic](#)
- By 2030, Latino youth are expected to comprise 29% of the U.S. youth population. Source: [Pew Hispanic](#)

### Percentage of Latino Voters as a Share of the Total Voting Population and Number of Electoral College Votes

Arizona	20.3%	11 votes
California	26.9%	55 votes
Colorado	14.2%	9 votes
Florida	17.1%	29 votes
Illinois	9.5%	20 votes
Nevada	15.9%	6 votes
New Jersey	12.8%	14 votes
New Mexico	40.1%	5 votes
New York	13.2%	29 votes
North Carolina	3.1%	15 votes
Ohio	2.1%	18 votes
Texas	27.4%	38 votes

Source: [Pew Hispanic](#)

Source: [National Archives and Records Administration](#)

