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Latino Political Participation and Representation in Elective Office

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Summary

America's Latino population is on the verge of becoming the largest minority group in the country, a phenomenon that is significant with respect to the representational responsibilities of Members of Congress. After several decades of rapid population growth, Latinos will surpass African Americans as the largest minority group within the decade, according to the Census Bureau projections. By 2010, Latinos are projected to be 13.8% of the national population (African Americans are projected to be 13.5%), and 16.3% of the population a decade later. However, Latino voting participation has remained static for decades, despite the intervening increase in population. In Presidential elections, Latino turnout increased from 28.9% to 45.1% between 1992 and 2000, but the increase in the 2000 election is at least partly due to a new Census Bureau method of calculating turnout that excludes non-citizens.[1] As a percentage of those who voted in recent elections, Latinos were 3% of the electorate in 1994, about 5% in 1998, and 4% in 2000 according to exit polls. The number of Latinos in Congress, 21, was unchanged after the 2000 election. In states with large Latino populations, California and Texas for example, Latinos make up about 15% of the electorate, based on recent elections. These factors may point to a groundswell in Latino participation, but to fully translate the rapid increase in population into political power will require even higher rates of Latino voter participation than in the past. This report will be updated to reflect the results of the 2002 general election.

By the time England established a permanent new world settlement at Jamestown in 1607, Spain's colonial empire spanned both American continents, from Cape Horn to what is now Canada. Shortly after Columbus's expeditions for Spain, explorers and missionaries founded colonies at Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic) in 1496, Puerto Rico in 1508, and Cuba in 1511. Within a century, Spanish missions extended across southwestern North America from St. Augustine (Florida, 1565) to Santa Fe (1609):

[1] The U.S. Census Bureau for the first time estimated the voting age population to exclude non-citizens in its report on the 2000 election; the Latino turnout rate in 2000 is based on this estimate. Turnout data for earlier years does not exclude non-citizens.

"There has been no other conquest like this in the annals of the human race. In one generation, the Spaniards acquired more new territory than Rome conquered in five centuries."[2]

By the beginning of the 17th century, as French and English colonization of North America gained momentum, Spain's power had begun to ebb. England had repelled Spain's attempt to invade the British Isles in 1588 and destroyed the Spanish fleet. Spain's effort to maintain its far-flung empire further burdened the nation and, over the next two centuries, its empire receded as the result of competition from other European colonizers and armed conflict.

Although Spain had claimed much of the North American interior, Spain's presence was found primarily in missions scattered along the Gulf coast and across the southwest to California. A series of agreements transferred the Louisiana territory, once claimed by Spain, back and forth between Spain and France until France sold the area to the United States in 1803. The U.S. nearly doubled its size by acquiring Louisiana, a vast region that extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. Shortly thereafter, Spain accepted the transfer of east and west Florida to the U.S., under the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819. Mexico declared independence from Spain in 1823, and Texas subsequently declared independence from Mexico in 1836. The U.S. annexed Texas in 1845. Following the Mexican-American War, the U.S. acquired lands north of the Rio Grande river under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase (1853). Under the terms of the Treaty of Paris (1898), which ended the Spanish-American War, Spain lost its remaining possessions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

Spain's cultural influence on the territory that became the United States remained long after the Spanish Empire collapsed. Explorers, missionaries, and conquistadors had pushed the boundaries of European settlement in the Americas and created a distinct people and culture, with the Spanish language as the common element. When the United States expanded to the Pacific, the Spanish-speaking people of the west and southwest, and the settlements they established at San Francisco, Santa Fe, and San Diego, became part of the new nation.

Until immigration laws were revised in 1965, most Latinos in the U.S. were of Mexican descent. Cuban communities in Florida, New Orleans, and New York can be traced to the 19th century, and a Puerto Rican community emerged in New York in the 1930s, but most of the Latino population in the 1950s was found in the Southwest, including the descendants of the Spanish who originally settled the territory when it was called New Spain. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (79 Stat. 911) eased previous restrictions on immigration and established a 120,000-per-year limit on immigration from countries in the Western Hemisphere. Latino immigration to the U.S. has increased sharply since then, reinforced by migration from South and Central American countries because of political and social unrest. From 1950 to 1990, the Latino population of the U.S. grew by an estimated 265%, whereas the total population grew by

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[2] Samuel E. Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 29.

approximately 50% during these four decades.[3] Latinos will be the largest minority group in the country within a decade, according to the Census Bureau, a phenomenon which has focused greater attention on Latino voters and their impact on electoral politics.

Voting Patterns in National Elections

Latino voters display a strong tendency to support Democratic candidates for federal office, particularly in U.S. House elections. Since 1980, Latino voters cast between 61% and 76% of their voters for Democratic House candidates, according to exit polls. In Presidential elections since 1976, Latino voters cast between 59% and 76% of their ballots for the Democratic nominee. Among major racial and ethnic groups, Latino voter loyalty to Democratic candidates is surpassed only by black support for Democrats.

Table 1. Voting Patterns by Race and Hispanic Origin in Presidential Elections, 1980-2000

		National vote	Hispanic	Black	White	Asian
1980	Reagan (R)	51%	33%	11%	56%	na
	Carter (D)	41%	59%	85%	36%	na
	Anderson (I)	7%	6%	3%	7%	na
1984	Reagan (R)	59%	37%	9%	64%	na
	Mondale (D)	40%	62%	90%	35%	na
1988	Bush (R)	53%	30%	12%	59%	na
	Dukakis (D)	45%	69%	86%	40%	na
1992	Clinton (D)	43%	62%	82%	39%	29%
	Bush (R)	38%	25%	11%	41%	55%
	Perot (I)	19%	14%	7%	20%	16%
1996	Clinton (D)	49%	72%	84%	43%	42%
	Dole (R)	41%	21%	12%	46%	48%
	Perot (I)	8%	6%	4%	9%	8%
2000	Bush (R)	48%	31%	8%	54%	41%
	Gore (D)	48%	67%	90%	42%	54%
	Nader (G)	2%	2%	1%	3%	4%

Source: Marjorie Connelly, "Who Voted: A Portrait of American Politics," 1976-2000, *The New York Times*, Nov. 12, 2000, section IV, p. 4.

Despite an overall tendency to support Democrats, Latinos are not a monolithic voting bloc, and occasionally provide strong support for Republican candidates. For

[3] Edna Acosta-Belén and Barbara R. Sjostrom, *The Hispanic Experience in the United States: Contemporary Issue and Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1988), p. 10.

example, 61% of Latinos voted for Republican Jeb Bush in the 1998 Florida governor's race, while 65% voted for Democrat Bob Graham in the U.S. Senate race.[4] In Texas, George W. Bush won 49% of the Latino vote in the 1998 governor's race.[5]

Voting Participation

In several large states, Latinos are a significant percentage of the voting age population: 28.1% in California, 27% in Texas, 15.2% in Florida, and, 13.3% in New York. Because Latinos are a growing proportion of the electorate in certain places, they have the potential to affect the outcome of some elections, especially in close races.

Table 2. Latino Voting Participation in Presidential Elections, 1976-2000

	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
Latino	31.8%	29.9%	32.6%	28.8%	28.9%	26.7%	45.1%
White	60.9%	60.9%	61.4%	59.1%	63.3%	56.0%	60.5%
Black	48.7%	50.5%	55.8%	51.5%	54.0%	50.6%	56.8%
Asian	na	na	na	na	27.3%	25.7%	43.3%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*, report P20-542 (Washington: February 2002), pp. 5, 12. Turnout figures for 2000 are based on the citizen voting age population, which the Census Bureau calculated for the first time in its 2000 report.

Latino voter turnout in the 2000 Presidential election was estimated to be 45.1%, the highest ever, probably due to the fact that the Census Bureau for the first time subtracted non-citizens from the voting age population (previous estimates included non-citizens). According to the Bureau, "citizenship is especially important in the consideration of racial and ethnic differences in voting rates," and an estimated 39 percent of Latinos were not citizens in 2000.[6] In spite of the recalculation of turnout according to the citizen voting age population, Latinos still lag considerably behind whites and blacks in voter turnout and vote at a slightly higher rate than Asian Americans.

Representation Among Elected Officials

The 107th Congress includes 21 Latinos, the same number as in the previous Congress, although several Latino Members of the 106th Congress were defeated by Latino candidates in the 2000 elections: former State Senator Hilda Solis defeated

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[4] CNN Allpolitics Election Night 1998.
[http://cnn.com/ELECTIONS/1998/states/FL/exit.poll.html], visited Apr. 21, 1999.

[5] The Associated Press, *Election Results for Hispanics*,
[http://www.infobeat.com/stories/cgi/story.cig?id+2560106407-ae2], visited June 28, 1999.

[6] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2000*, report P20-542 (Washington: February 2002), p. 2.

Representative Matthew Martinez in California's 31st district Democratic primary and faced no opposition in the general election; and Aníbal Acevedo Vilá defeated Carlos Romero-Barceló as Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico. All current Latino Members serve in the House of Representatives.

Table 3. Latino Members in the 107th Congress

Name	State or Territory and Congressional District	Years of Service
Aníbal Acevedo Vilá	Puerto Rico	2001-present
Joe Baca, D	California, 42	1999-present
Xavier Becerra, D	California, 30	1993-present
Henry Bonilla, R	Texas, 23	1993-present
Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R	Florida, 21	1993-present
Charlie Gonzalez, D	Texas, 20	1998-present
Luis V. Gutierrez, D	Illinois, 4	1993-present
Rubén Hinojosa, D	Texas, 15	1997-present
Hilda Solis, D	California, 31	2001-present
Robert Menéndez, D	New Jersey, 13	1993-present
Grace F. Napolitano, D	California, 34	1998-present
Solomon P. Ortiz, D	Texas, 27	1983-present
Ed Pastor, D	Arizona, 2	1991-present
Silvestre Reyes, D	Texas, 16	1997-present
Ciro Rodriquez, D	Texas, 28	1997-present
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R	Florida, 18	1989-present
Lucille Roybal-Allard, D	California, 33	1993-present
Loretta Sanchez, D	California, 46	1997-present
José E. Serrano, D	New York, 16	1990-present
Robert A. Underwood, D	Guam	1993-present
Nydia Velázquez, D	New York, 12	1993-present

The first Latino Member of Congress, Delegate Joseph Marion Hernandez of the Territory of Florida, took office in 1822. The first Latino Member elected from a state was Romualdo Pacheco of California, who won by a margin of one vote in the 1876 election. Since then, 38 Latino Members have been elected to Congress from the states.[7] Thirty-five of the 38 Latino Members elected from the states have served in the U.S. House of Representatives; three served in the U.S. Senate. The first Latino Member of the Senate was Dennis Chavez of New Mexico, who was elected in 1936. The most recent Latino

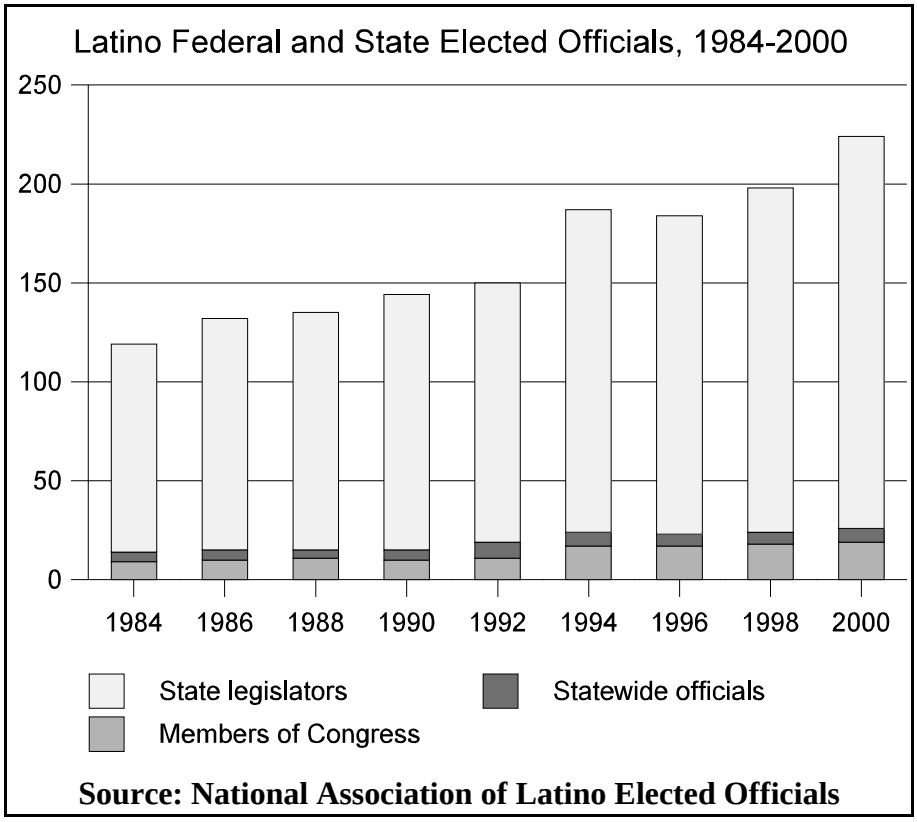
[7] This figure excludes territorial delegates, resident commissioners of Puerto Rico, and delegates from Guam and the Virgin Islands.

Member of the Senate was Joseph M. Montoya of New Mexico, who was defeated in his re-election bid in 1976, having first been elected in 1964. The 103rd Congress included 21 Latino members, the highest number ever elected to Congress to date.

In addition to the Latino Members elected from the states, others have served in Congress as resident commissioners from Puerto Rico, as non-voting delegates from Guam and the Virgin Islands, and as territorial delegates prior to their state's admission to the Union. Latino Members who have served in Congress in these positions include 10 territorial delegates, 16 resident commissioners of Puerto Rico, and two non-voting delegates from Guam and one from the Virgin Islands.

Although Latinos have served in the Congress since the 1820s, some political milestones have been reached only recently. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's election to Congress in 1988 was a first for Latinas and Cuban-Americans; in 1992, Nydia Velázquez was the first Puerto Rican American woman, and Lucille Roybal-Allard the first Mexican American woman, elected to Congress.

Between 1984 and 2000, the number of Latinos in Congress has more than doubled (from nine to 21), and the number of state legislators increased from 105 to 198. There were five Latino statewide elected officials in 1984 and seven following the 2000 election.



Source: National Association of Latino Elected Officials

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