



Photo Credit: Victor Espinosa

2011 Data Series ILLINOIS LATINOS AT THE VOTING BOOTH

SHAKIRA SELLS OUT SHOWS IN ROSEMONT. FAMILY-OWNED TAQUERIAS DOT STREET CORNERS IN TINY DOWNSTATE COBDEN. SUBURBAN KIDS ARE WAITLISTED FOR SPANISH CLASSES IN SCHAUMBURG. THE ILLINOIS LATINO COMMUNITY IS BECOMING AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT PART OF ITS SOCIAL LANDSCAPE. BUT NOWHERE WILL THE PRESENCE OF THIS FAST-GROWING COMMUNITY BE MORE FELT THAN AT THE BALLOT BOX.

There are 500,000 more Latinos living in Illinois now than there were a decade ago, according to 2010 Census data. The community's growth in an otherwise-shrinking state means that Latinos are now the second-largest ethnic/racial group in Illinois, accounting for 16 percent of the population.¹ In real terms, they are one-in-four children under age five, one-in-five public school students and nearly three-in-five new entrants to the workforce.²

There are real political implications to these growing Latino demographics. In December 2010, Latino Policy Forum analysis indicated that Illinois would have lost two Congressional seats—instead of just one—if it weren't for Latino population growth.³ And their growing political power doesn't stop there: This brief provides a statistical profile of Latino voters in Illinois and considers the implications of their growing presence at the ballot box.

BY THE NUMBERS

As the second-largest ethnic group in Illinois (Table 1), Latino contributions to the state’s economic and political climates are gaining significance.⁴ The community’s growing numbers suggest an expanding role in the overall electorate—and a greater influence on Election Day. But age and citizenship mitigate their political power.

More than a third of the Latino population is under the age of 18, a significantly higher portion than for other ethnic groups (Table 2).⁵ Their youthfulness is a double-edged sword: While the number of Latino voters will steadily increase as the population matures, the current proportion of voting-age Latinos is considerably smaller than other segments of the population.

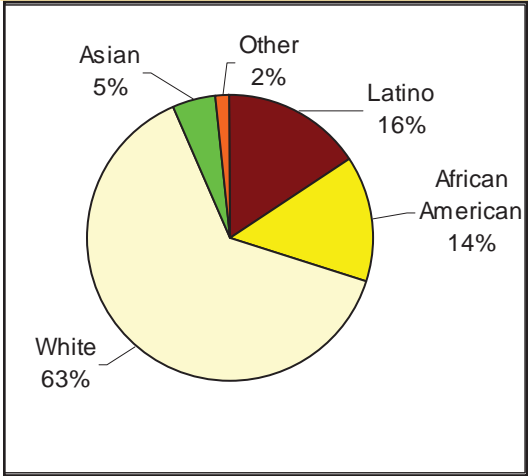
Citizenship is also at play in Latino electoral participation. While over 71 percent are U.S. citizens, the remainder—including legal permanent residents, temporary workers, refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants—are not eligible to vote.⁶

However, while age and citizenship limit their political participation now, these very factors will boost the Latino electorate in the future. Over 93 percent under age 18 are U.S. citizens.⁷ This means that as this large young demographic comes of age, the proportion of Latinos eligible to vote will increase significantly—as will their share of

the electorate and ability to affect the outcomes of elections.

Age and citizenship aside, Latino civic participation has steadily increased since 2000. The number of registered Latino voters increased by more than 120,000, from 262,000 to 385,000, between 2000 and 2008 (Table 3).⁸ That figure represents a 47 percent increase in the number of registered voters, which is the largest percent increase of any racial/ethnic group during the same period. The Latino share of registered voters in Illinois also increased from 4 percent to 6 percent.

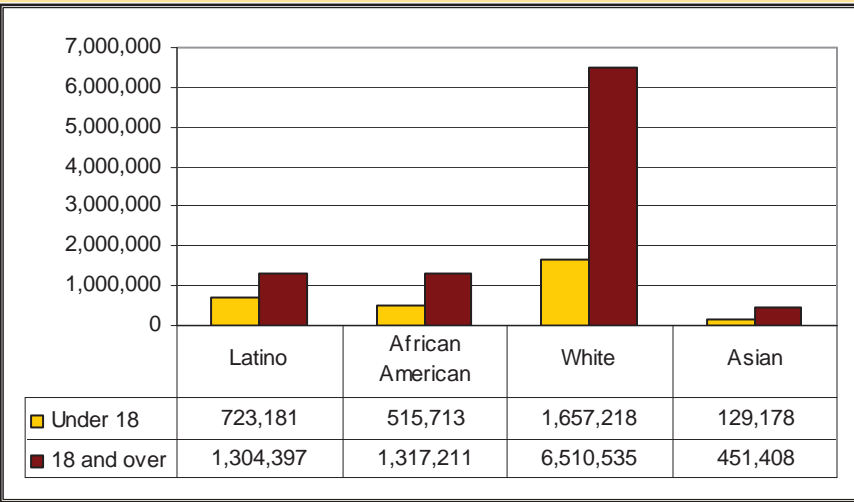
Table 1: Illinois Population by Race/Ethnicity (2010)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. See citation 4.

THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED LATINO VOTERS GREW BY MORE THAN 120,000 BETWEEN 2000 AND 2008, A 47% INCREASE.

Table 2: Age Distribution by Ethnicity (2010)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. See citation 5.

Table 3: Latino Voting Behavior Over Time in Illinois

Electoral Indicators	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	% Change: '00-'08
Voting-age population (18+)	771,000	938,000	1,031,000	1,086,000	1,081,000	40.2%
Eligible voters (Citizen, 18+)	400,000	529,000	608,000	594,000	671,000	67.8%
Percent of all eligible voters	4.9%	6.2%	7.0%	7.1%	7.7%	-
Registered voters	262,000	299,000	343,000	316,000	385,000	46.9%
Percent of all registered voters	4.4%	5.2%	5.3%	5.5%	6.3%	-
Voter turnout	218,000	171,000	294,000	185,000	314,000	44.0%
Percent of overall voter turnout	4.3%	4.3%	5.2%	4.7%	5.8%	-
Percent of registered Latinos who voted	83.2%	57.2%	85.7%	58.5%	81.6%	-
Percent of eligible Latinos who voted	54.5%	32.3%	48.4%	31.1%	46.8%	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau See citation 8.

While the proportion of registered Latino voters continues to rise, this segment of the electorate has yet to tap its own potential. During the 2008 election, more than 285,000 eligible Latino voters remained on the sidelines because they were not registered to vote (Table 4).⁹ As a result of this and other factors, Latino political power is overshadowed by other segments of the electorate. In fact, less than half of eligible Latino voters took part in the 2008 General Election, compared to more than 60 percent of eligible White and African American voters (Table 5).¹⁰ Nonetheless, a scan of voting behavior among Latinos who were registered to vote shows that 4-in-5 punched their ballot that year.

Data show that Latino registered voters are coming out to the polls: Voter turnout rose 44 percent, from 218,000 to 314,000, between the 2000 and 2008 general elections.¹¹ At the same time, the Latino share



Photo Credit: Olga Lopez

4-IN-5 REGISTERED LATINO VOTERS IN ILLINOIS PUNCHED THE BALLOT IN THE 2008 GENERAL ELECTION.

of overall voter turnout grew from approximately 4 percent to 6 percent. And while voter turnout generally dips at midterms, as noted in 2002 and 2006 above, November 2010 exit polling suggested that Latinos comprised approximately 8 percent of Illinois voter turnout, reflecting a continuous trend of increasing voter participation and a growing presence among the electorate.¹²

ON THE GROUND

What do gains in Latino civic participation mean for their representation and influence in government affairs?

Illinois was home to just 113 Latino elected officials in 2010, a majority of whom served in municipal governments and school boards (Table 6).¹³ At the state and federal levels, their representation is even lower: Only 12 of the 177 members of the Illinois General Assembly are Latino—not to mention just one member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

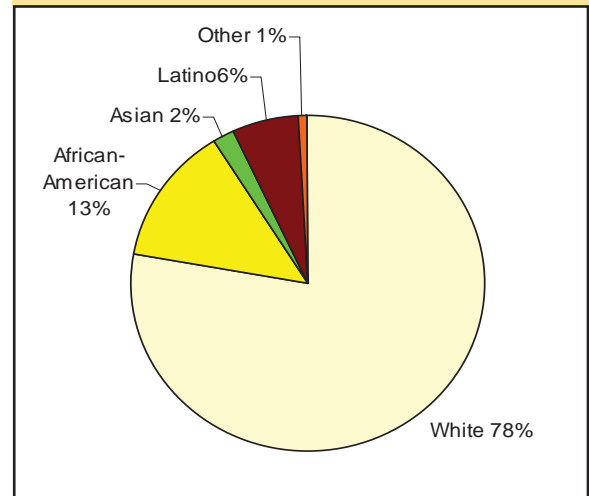
Current redistricting efforts are likely to create additional, much-needed opportunities for Latinos to pursue elected office. The well-being of

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the state is increasingly linked to the well-being of its fastest-growing community. And political representation is critical to ensuring that government appropriately invests in Latino communities.

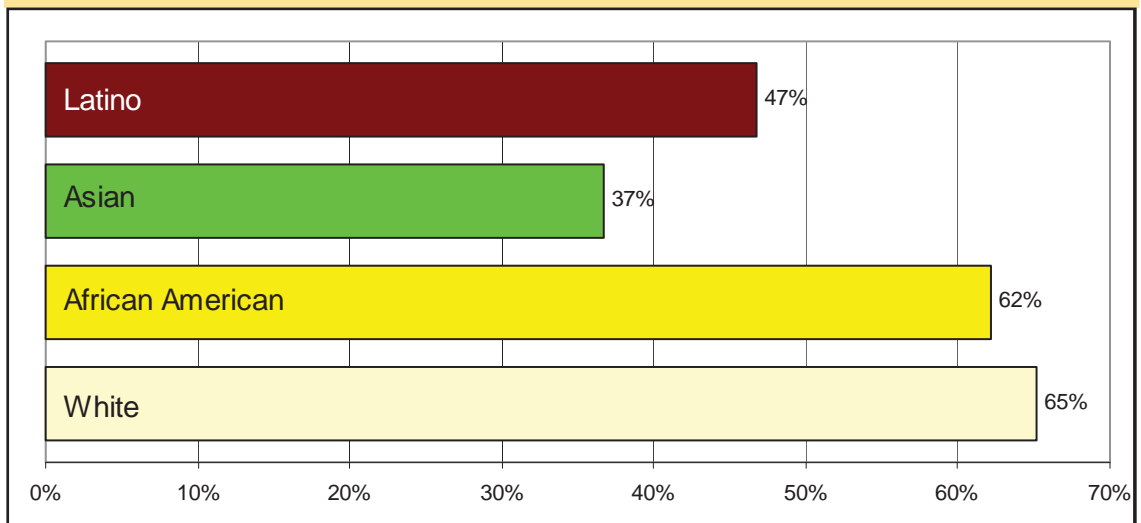
Growing political power translates into increased government accountability to Latino constituencies. It is vital that the Latino electorate continue to show its strength at the ballot box, in town-halls and other municipal gatherings, and at local

Table 4: Illinois Registered Voters by Ethnicity (2008)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. See citation 9.

Table 5: Voter Turnout as a Percentage of Eligible Voters by Ethnicity (2008 General Election)



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. See citation 10.

Table 6: IL Latinos in Elected Office (2010)

U.S. Representatives	1
State Officials	0
State Senators	4
State Representatives	8
County Officials	13
Municipal Officials	49
Judicial/Law Enforcement	9
Education/School Board	24
Special District Officials	5
Total	113

Source: NALEO. See citation 13.

school board meetings. Increasing participation in each of these civic activities will yield greater visibility, collaboration, and results.

WHAT'S NEXT

Latinos are a more visible thread in the state social fabric. Population growth is spurring greater economic, social, and political contributions across Illinois, and this translates to power and influence gains at each election. Latinos have registered and voted in greater numbers in each general and mid-term election since 2000. As their share of the electorate continues to rise, so does their opportunity to have a positive impact on day-to-day government business for the benefit of their children, families and workers, and by extension, all of Illinois.

Photo Credit: Olga Lopez



CITATIONS

1. Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1, PL2, PL3, and PL4, and 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables P1, P2, P3, and P4. Analysis by Latino Policy Forum.
2. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2009 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate. Data for Hispanic or Latino (of any race); White alone, not Hispanic or Latino; Black or African-American alone, not Hispanic or Latino; and Asian alone, not Hispanic or Latino. Analysis by Latino Policy Forum.
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4. Census 2000 Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables PL1, PL2, PL3, and PL4, and 2010 Census Redistricting Data (Public Law 94-171) Summary File, Tables P1, P2, P3, and P4. Data for Hispanic or Latino (of any race); White alone, not Hispanic or Latino; Black or African-American alone, not Hispanic or Latino; and Asian alone, not Hispanic or Latino.
5. See citation 1.
6. See citation 2.
7. See citation 2.
8. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Table 4a. Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2000. November 2002. November 2004. November 2006. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008. Analysis by Latino Policy Forum.
9. U.S. Bureau of the Census. Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2008. Analysis by Latino Policy Forum.
10. See citation 9.
11. See citation 8.
12. CNN Politics: Election Center. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/> (Accessed November 8, 2010).
13. NALEO Educational Fund, 2010 National Directory of Latino Elected Officials.



ABOUT SOL

SOL is a series of periodic policy briefs that combines data with insightful analysis from the Latino Policy Forum.

The series will provide a unique snapshot of the growth, influence and challenges of the local Latino community, for use by community leaders, urban planners, elected officials, journalists, and anyone interested in building a shared future for all of Illinois.

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