

A SNAPSHOT OF

LATINO VOTERS

IN NORTH CAROLINA

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INTRODUCTION

Latinos‡ make up nearly 9% of North Carolina's 9.7 million people, ranking the state 11th nationally and 3rd in the Southeast (after Florida and Georgia) for the total number of Latino residents.¹ From 2000 to 2012, the Hispanic population in North Carolina more than doubled to more than 830,000.²

Although Latinos currently comprise only about 2% of the North Carolina registered voters, their number and share will continue to grow as U.S.-born children become of age, legal permanent residents

naturalize, and in-country migration of Latinos from other states increases.³ Despite their relatively small numbers, the potential impact of Latino voters in a swing state is of special interest during a critical election year.

This brief report provides information on the demographic profile of the Latino electorate in North Carolina, how many eligible Latino citizens remain unregistered, and how best to reach them.

† With research assistance from Daniel Jasper. Design by Gabe Casalett.

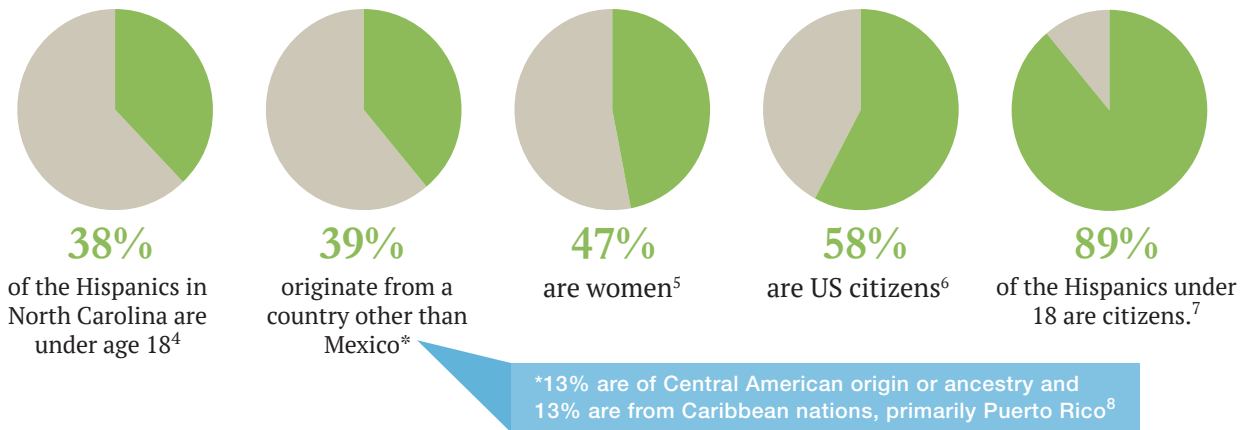
‡ The terms Latino and Hispanic will be used interchangeably throughout this report.



LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

PROFILE OF LATINO VOTERS IN NC

The reality of the Hispanic population in North Carolina belies the stereotypical image of single men from Mexico, migrating from one job to another, without documents. A true profile reveals that:



Moreover, the Latino population in North Carolina is well within its third-generation, challenging the perception that most are recent transplants without roots in the state.⁹

How Many Are Registered?

The number of registered voters who are Latino is not easily determined. As of May 8, 2012, there were 91,600 self-identified Latino registered voters, representing a 35% increase over 2008 (see figure 1).¹⁰ By contrast, there were 49,600 Native Americans, 1,370,000 African Americans, and 4,571,000 whites registered as of May 8, 2012.¹¹

Voters of any race may choose Hispanic as an ethnic classification. However, voter registration forms in North Carolina did not include a “Hispanic/Latino” classification until 2002. That means many people who have not updated their registration since 2002 are not accurately identified in the voter rolls. In addition, thousands of more recent voters simply bypass the question about their ethnic identity. Based on the number of people who indicated “Other” or who are coded as “Undesignated,” there could easily be 20,000 to 25,000 registered Latino voters who are not identified by ethnicity on the official voter rolls. In fact, the Census Bureau’s analysis of the 2010 election shows that 105,000 Hispanics in North Carolina report they were registered to vote, or 26,300 more than the 78,700 self-identified Hispanics on the voter rolls in November 2010.¹²

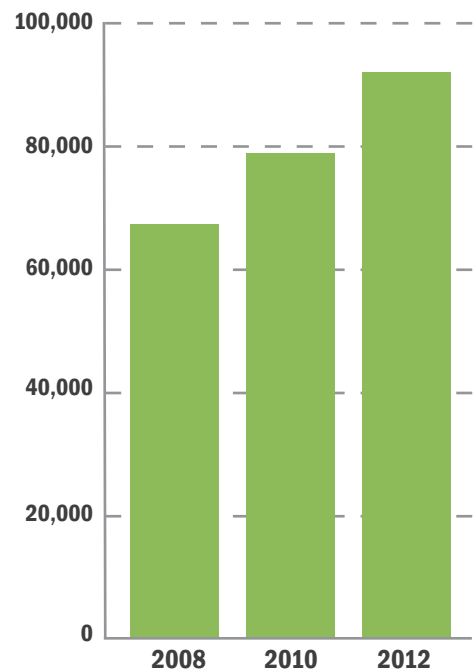


FIGURE 1: SELF-IDENTIFIED LATINO VOTERS FROM 2008 -2012

LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

As of May 2012, we estimate the number of registered Hispanics at 115,000 (91,600 self-identified to the Board of Elections plus 23,400 others). We have little detail about the 23,400 although they are likely older than the 91,600 who completed or updated a registration form after January 2002; most of the details in this report about age, residency, and voter history are based on an analysis of the records of those 91,600 voters.

We estimate that there are 115,000 registered Latino voters and about 100,000 remaining eligible, but unregistered voters.

How Many Are Unregistered?

How many eligible Hispanic voters remain to be registered in North Carolina? The answer to this popular question depends on several estimates. The Census Bureau's American Community Survey puts the number of Hispanic citizens of voting age in 2010 at 193,500, including 140,900 native-born and 52,600 naturalized U.S. citizens.¹⁵ Projecting forward to 2012, with the addition

of a significant number of native-born 16 and 17 year olds and other new citizens, we estimate the number of voting-age Latino citizens is now about 215,000. Considering that 115,000 are already registered, we estimate that about 100,000 eligible Latino voters remain unregistered.¹⁴

Voters By Age

In general, the Latino population is young, suggesting that its electoral power is just beginning to be felt. The median age of all Hispanics in North Carolina is 24, compared to a median age of 37 for the entire state, 41 for non-Hispanic whites, and 34 for non-Hispanic Blacks.¹⁵ This youthfulness is also reflected in the Latino electorate: Voters aged 18-40 make up 62% of registered Latino voters, while they only comprise 34% and 43% of white and Black voters, respectively (see figure 2).

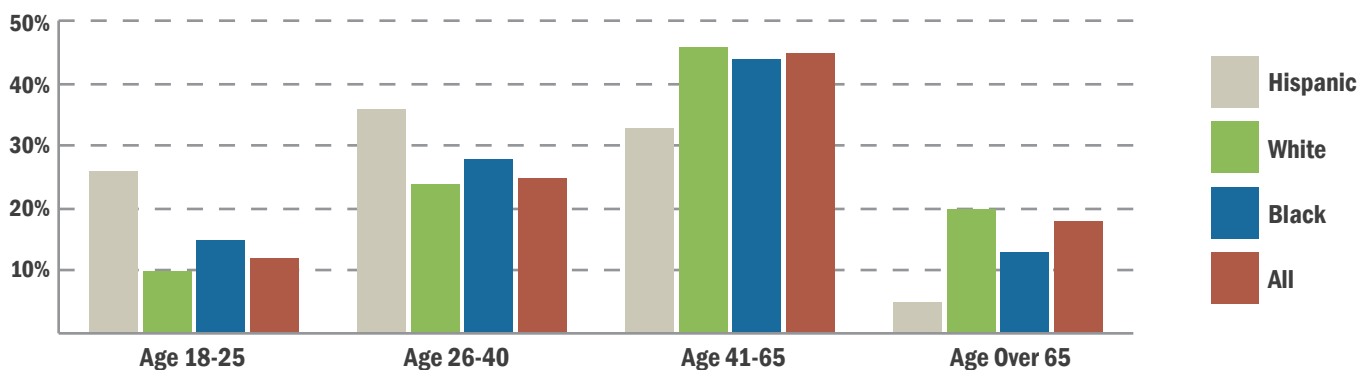


FIGURE 2: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF REGISTERED VOTERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Across the nation, some states have seen a decrease in the number of registered Hispanic voters, despite the growth in population.¹⁶ Because of its young and growing Latino population, North Carolina is bucking this trend with steady increases in registered Latino voters.

LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Voters By Location

Hispanic residents are not evenly distributed across North Carolina. Most (52%) of them live in 10 counties¹⁷ in the urbanized Piedmont (see table 1), but they make up a larger share of the people in several more rural counties. For example, Hispanics are more than 14% of the total population in the rural counties of Duplin, Lee, Sampson, Greene, and Montgomery and between 12% and 14% in Chatham and Hoke.¹⁸

Unsurprisingly, the 10 counties with the largest Latino populations also comprise the majority of the 10 counties with the largest numbers of self-identified Hispanic voters (see table 2), with the exception of Orange and Onslow Counties. 61% of Latino voters are concentrated in these ten counties.

Table 1: Top 10 Counties for Latino Population*

County	Hispanics, All Ages	% Pop. Hispanic
Mecklenburg	111,944	12.2%
Wake	87,922	9.8%
Forsyth	41,775	11.9%
Durham	36,077	13.5%
Guilford	34,826	7.1%
Cumberland	30,190	9.5%
Johnston	21,814	12.9%
Union	20,967	10.4%
Onslow	17,896	10.1%
Cabarrus	16,767	9.4%

*As of April 2010

Table 2: Top 10 Counties for Latino Voters*

County	# Registered Voters
Mecklenburg	14,398
Wake	12,157
Cumberland	7,993
Guilford	4,209
Forsyth	3,974
Durham	3,667
Onslow	2,965
Union	2,798
Cabarrus	2,022
Orange	1,987

*As of May 8 2012

Voters By Party

Although a plurality (44%) of Hispanic voters in North Carolina are registered Democrats, Unaffiliated voters also make up a sizeable portion (37%) of the Latino electorate (see figure 3). Younger voters choose Unaffiliated more frequently than their elders – or they mark no partisan choice when they register which automatically re-

records them as Unaffiliated. In 2000, only 15% of all registered voters were Unaffiliated, but that share has now doubled to 25%. The large share of Hispanic voters who don't make a partisan preference indicates neither major party can take their support for granted; the lack of party loyalty is also an added challenge for voter turnout.

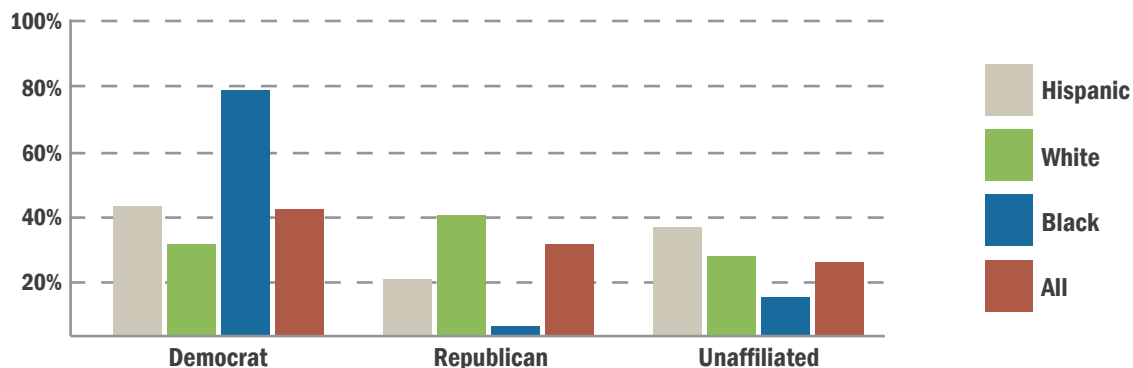


FIGURE 3: PARTY AFFILIATION OF REGISTERED VOTERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY

LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Voter Turnout

Of course, registering is just part of the process of civic engagement. Another key part is actually voting! For decades, North Carolina has ranked in the bottom third of the 50 states for voter turnout, largely due to the legacy of Jim Crow segregation, voter suppression tactics, and disenfranchisement. In fact, 2008 was the high-water mark for voter turnout among the state's registered voters in more than a century.

In the 2008 general election, 70% of all registered voters cast a ballot, moving North Carolina up to 20th place

among the 50 states for voter turnout. While 60% of registered Latinos in North Carolina voted that fall, 72% of Blacks (a modern record) and 69% of whites turned out.

“60%
of registered Latino voters
turned out in 2008”

POLICY CONCERNS OF THE GROWING LATINO ELECTORATE

Historical experiences help shape the political outlook and behavior of an individual or group. While no ethnic group is uniform in its beliefs, various polls and research studies shed light on the attitudes of Latinos and potential policy impact as they gain more political clout. Here are some of those findings.

- Latinos favor a **more activist government** than the typical American: 56% of Latinos (compared to 37% of all Americans) say government should do more to solve our country's problems.¹⁹
- Among Americans under age 65, Hispanics are more than twice as likely as non-Hispanics to lack health insurance (34% compared to 15%).²⁰ A majority (60%) of Hispanic voters believe that the **government should ensure that all Americans have access to health care.**²¹
- Although Latino voters are **twice as religious** as other Americans (46% attend church weekly compared to 23%), they **strongly prefer separation of church and state**: 72% of registered Latino voters do not want a politician's religion guiding his or her decisions and 82% do not want their religious leaders telling them how to vote.²²
- Although economic issues remain at the top of Latino voter policy concerns, a recent poll in Florida found that 30% of registered Hispanic voters identified **immigration or the DREAM Act as the top issue** that they wanted Congress and the President to address. And, a large majority (80%) of registered Latino voters in Florida said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate with a supportive, rather than hostile, stance on immigration.²³

LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

PROMISING PRACTICES IN LATINO VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Although population growth has spurred increased Latino presence at the polls nationally, Hispanics continue to have lower rates of registration and turnout compared to other groups.²⁴ Additionally, younger voters, who are a significant portion of the Latino electorate, tend to be less interested in politics and less likely to vote.²⁵ Without a concerted effort to increase political participation, the Latino electorate may remain a “sleeping giant” that is not realizing its full political potential.²⁶

Below is a short list of promising practices and strategies to boost voter engagement:

- **Focus on registration and mobilization.** The potential power promised by Latino population growth is not currently reflected at the polls, in part because Latinos register and vote at lower rates than other voters. Although low rates of citizenship, socioeconomic status, and age can account for some of this gap, experts suggest that increasing voter registration and GOTV efforts are the most important ways to close it.²⁷
- **Communicate with Hispanics in both English and Spanish.** Latino voters use both English and Spanish-language news outlets to get their information, yet too often outreach to Hispanics only occurs in Spanish.²⁸ While Spanish-language media is most effective in reaching Latinos who predominantly speak Spanish, targeted appeals in English media outlets will also reach bilingual or predominantly English-speaking Latinos.²⁹
- **Use social media and radio to connect with Latino voters.** Hispanic adults are more likely than other groups to be engaged in social media, making it an effective medium for outreach.³⁰ Also, non-partisan advertising on Spanish-language radio has also been shown to increase Latino turnout by 4.3 percentage points.³¹
- **Connect with Latino voters through community-based organizations.** Too often, efforts to engage Hispanic voters wax and wane with the election season. Engaging community-based organizations in year-round voter registering and ongoing civic education is the most important way to build on existing relationships within the community and ensure that voting becomes an important habit and regular activity.³²
- **Acknowledge the diversity among Latinos.** Remember that the Hispanic community in the U.S. is not monolithic; it represents multiple nations of origin and ethnicities within those nations. These differences manifest themselves in food choices, holidays celebrated, vocabulary, socio-economic status, race, and ideological differences. The degree of acculturation and number of generations that a person’s family has been in the U.S. also shapes their perspective on political participation.³³

VOTER PROTECTION

A good registration and mobilization campaign is not enough. In a swing state, where each vote is highly coveted, some groups may seek to gain an advantage by tactics designed to confuse, intimidate, challenge, or discourage voters who might back their opponents.

Monitoring election mischief and addressing voter concerns about intimidation or misinformation is often referred to as “Election Protection,” and it’s an important part of any program to ensure that every eligible voter can successfully cast a ballot.

LATINO VOTERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Unfortunately, attempts to discourage legitimate voters from turning out have already begun in North Carolina. False information about registration and ID requirements has been sent out through the Internet and re-circulated, sometimes innocently. In May, conservative filmmaker James O’Keefe unveiled a now-discredited video exposé that claimed to show two non-citizens who voted illegally.³⁴ (One of the voters was a Latino; both were citizens, contrary to O’Keefe’s assertions.) In June, the Voter Integrity Project of North Carolina unsuccessfully challenged the citizenship of more than 500 voters in Wake County, based on a flawed analysis of the responses people gave

Election Hotlines:
866-OUR-VOTE
and
888-VE-Y-VOTA

to notices that they show up for jury duty.³⁵ Low-income voters and people of color are historically the preferred targets of voter suppression tactics. Additionally, passage of anti-immigrant laws and an increase in deportations may also discourage Hispanic voters from going to the polls for fear of harassment and racial profiling.³⁶

Educating Hispanics about their voting rights and the national Election Protection hotline numbers (available in English and Spanish) are critical steps in protecting the Latino vote. It takes a lot more than a registration drive, even a good one, to empower voters.

CONCLUSION

Judging by the numbers, Latino political power in North Carolina is poised to increase. But realizing this opportunity will require targeted efforts to register all eligible voters and increase turnout. It doesn’t take a lot of money or fancy polling to get started; even the smallest efforts can make a difference! Set up a table at a grocery store, register your staff and clients, remind your members, friends, and family to vote, get out the word on the radio and in newspapers, or mail reminder postcards to registered voters in your county.

This election season is an important opportunity for Latinos in North Carolina to flex their political power, but it’s only the beginning. Helping the growing Hispanic population become a political force will require a year-round program of education, engagement, and leadership training that extends well beyond this year. Together, we can ensure that the Latino community in North Carolina gets the respect and recognition it deserves from policymakers – resulting in better, fairer laws for all North Carolinians.

END NOTES

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How We Can Help!

The organizations producing this booklet are committed to building political power among historically disenfranchised groups and firmly believe that a multicultural electorate leads to better public policy. We have Spanish-language resources to help with voter registration and are happy to share our expertise in voter mobilization with you and your organization! Please contact us for materials, voter registration assistance and other strategic help:

- **Democracy North Carolina:** (888) OUR-VOTE or go to www.democracy-nc.org
- **Latin American Coalition:** (704) 531-3848 or go to www.latinamericancoalition.org
- **El Pueblo:** (919) 835-1525 or go to www.elpueblo.org
- **NC Latino Coalition:** (919) 423-6332 or go to www.latinocoalitionnc.org