



Latino Voters and the 2020 Election: Part 1: Numbers, Trends, and Influence

Overview

With a population of 60 million, Hispanics* are the second-largest racial or ethnic group in the United States, and in 2020 are expected to be the second-largest group of voting-age Americans.

In 2020, there are competing factors shaping the growth and turnout of the Latino electorate. On one hand, the coronavirus pandemic is inflicting a disproportionate impact on the health and economic well-being of Latinos, has severely impacted voter registration efforts, and will affect people's ability to vote depending on what measures are implemented. On the other hand, civic engagement efforts and polling point to deep concerns in the community over health care and pandemic responses, jobs and the economy, immigration, and anti-Latino/immigrant discrimination which, combined with renewed efforts to avail these voters of options like vote-by-mail (VBM), could energize more Latinos and propel them to the polls.

This brief, the first of a three-part series, takes a closer look at the makeup, distribution, and participation trends of the Latino electorate, as well as its potential impact in select races. Parts two and three in this series will cover factors in the election process and administration arena which could impact the Latino electorate—including attitudes toward and vote-by-mail trends among Hispanic voters—and look at party and candidate support trends, traits Latinos would like to see in a presidential candidate, and the issues that top the agenda for this fast-growing electorate.

* 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. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Key points covered in this brief include:

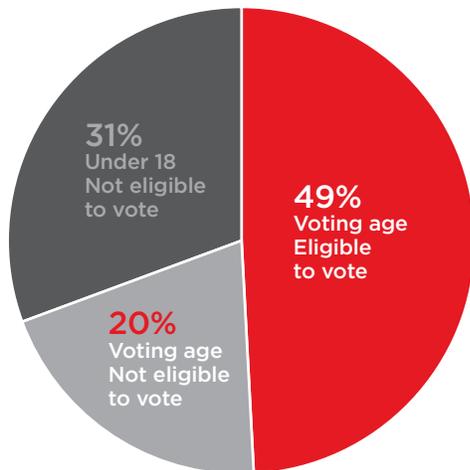
- **Latinos are one of the fastest-growing segments of the electorate.** Three sources combine to keep the Latino electorate on its ever-increasing trajectory: (1) young Latino citizens aging into the electorate at a rapid pace, (2) newly naturalized citizens becoming eligible to register and vote, and (3) newly enrolled voters from the large existing pool of voting-age citizens in need of registration.
- **Registered Latinos vote.** In presidential elections, 80–83% of registered Hispanics vote. Thus, a surefire way to increase Latino voting participation is to increase registration. In the 2016 presidential election, for example, 12.7 million Latinos voted (1.5 million more than in 2012, and 83% of those registered). Even so, a gap remained: that year, 11.4 million eligible Latinos were in need of registration. Significantly, nearly two million more Latino citizens will have turned 18 by the November 2020 election.
- **Hispanic participation was unprecedented in the 2018 midterm election.** Latinos turned out at near presidential election levels, with 11.2 million voting, in great part due to community organizing, registration and Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) efforts. That year, Latino-heavy districts showed some of the highest vote growth percentages. This also signals the importance of GOTV efforts, particularly in midterm elections when participation even among those registered may be lower.
- **Latino voters will play a decisive role in 2020.** Latinos are geographically concentrated in states that are rich in primary delegates and Electoral College votes, are electoral battlegrounds, or both. In addition to down-ballot races, Latinos will be a critical factor in the winning equation of several presidential battleground states, as well as Senate and House races. The five congressional districts with the largest numbers of eligible Latino voters can be found in Texas and Florida.¹
- **Candidates matter, issues matter, and meaningful outreach is essential.** Unfortunately, candidates and campaigns still neglect this electorate. A majority of Latinos, including those highly likely to vote and in battleground states, consistently report not being contacted by campaigns and parties.

Before COVID-19 struck, the 2020 cycle appeared on track to see a huge surge in new voters. However, as the pandemic takes its toll, between February and March 2020, overall voter registration saw an average decrease of almost 39%.² The pandemic presents an additional challenge to voter registration as many government offices, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles where many would-be voters register, have seen their day-to-day operations significantly restricted. Many voter registration campaigns have also been impacted, as health and safety concerns have forced a stop in traditional, in-person canvassing and public gatherings. Naturalization ceremonies have also been put on pause, preventing many would-be newly naturalized Americans the opportunity to vote.

Profile of the Latino Electorate

In 2018, the Latino population reached 59.9 million, accounting for 18% of the U.S. population. As a group, Latinos are young, with a median age of 30 (compared to 44 for non-Hispanic Whites, 34 for Black or African Americans, and 37 for Asian Americans). Eight in 10 Latinos are United States citizens.³

FIGURE 1. Latino Population by Voting Age and Voting Eligibility



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey, Table B050031.

In terms of current voting eligibility (Figure 1):

- Almost one-third of the Hispanic population, or 18.6 million, are under the age of 18 and thus not yet eligible to vote. However, 95% of Latinos under age 18 are U.S. citizens, and each year nearly one million turn 18, making this cohort a major source fueling Latino voter growth for decades to come.
- Another 20% of Latinos, or 11.8 million, are adult immigrants not yet eligible to vote. It is estimated that at least 4.4 million are currently eligible to apply for citizenship.⁴
- In total, just under half of the existing Latino population (49%) are citizens of voting age, and thus eligible to register and vote in the next election.⁵ In the last presidential election, 57.3% of the Latino citizen voting-age population (CVAP) was registered to vote, and of those registered, 83% voted.⁶



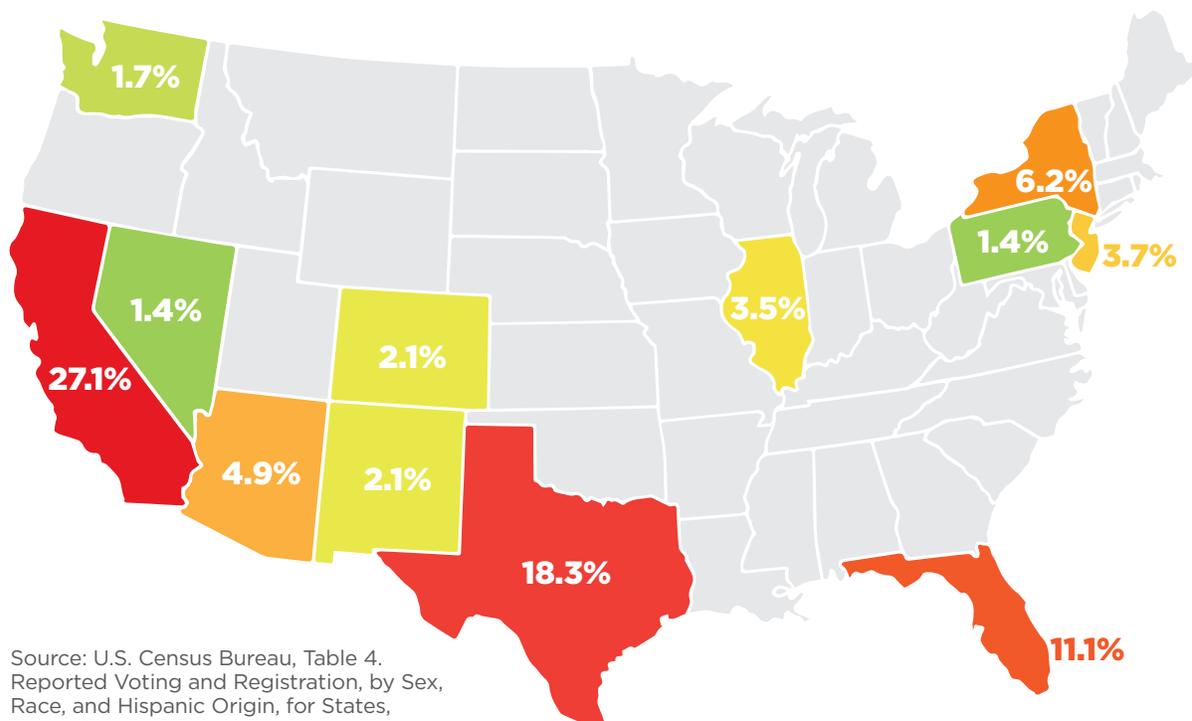
A UnidosUS canvasser registers a man to vote outside a supermarket in Florida in 2019.

Geography of the Latino Vote

Latinos are geographically concentrated in states that are rich in primary delegates and Electoral College votes, are electoral battlegrounds, or both. For example, looking at 2018 midterm numbers as reference:⁷

- More than half of all Latino registered voters live in one of three states: California (27.1%), Texas (18.3%), and Florida (11.1%).
- The top 12 states in order of share of Latino registered voters nationwide are California, Texas, Florida, New York, Arizona, New Jersey, Illinois, Colorado, New Mexico, Washington, Pennsylvania, and Nevada (Figure 2). Combined, these states comprised more than 80% of the country’s Latino registered voters and Latino votes cast in 2018.
- Nationally, Latinos accounted for about 13% of the total CVAP. In eight states (New Mexico, Texas, California, Arizona, Florida, Nevada, New Jersey, and Colorado) the Latino share of the statewide CVAP was higher than the national average.
- Nationally, Latinos accounted for 10% of the country’s registered voters. In nine states, the Latino share of the state’s registered voters was higher than the national average, including the eight states listed above plus New York.
- In 2018, 54% of Latino voting-age citizens were registered. Six states had higher Latino voter registration rates (New Jersey, Arizona, Washington, California, Florida, and Colorado), while New York and New Mexico matched the national average.
- While participation dips in midterms for all groups, and particularly Latinos, in 2018 the Latino share of the electorate in most of the above states was the same or higher than in the 2016 presidential election.

FIGURE 2. Top 12 States in Order of Share of Latino Registered Voters Nationwide



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table 4. Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for States, November 2018.

Participation Trends

While it is true that the overall participation of the Latino citizen voting-age population still lags behind those of other groups, it is important to note positive trends that give this electorate significant traction.

Three sources combine to keep the Latino electorate on its ever-increasing trajectory: (1) young Latino citizens aging into the electorate at a rapid pace, (2) newly naturalized citizens becoming eligible to register and vote, and (3) newly enrolled voters from the large existing pool of voting-age citizens in need of registration.

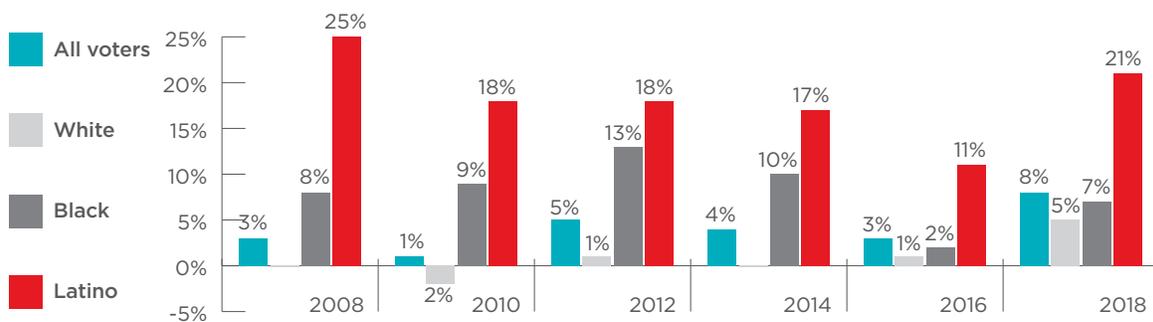
These factors help explain why Latino voter registration and participation rates continue to grow at a higher pace than the rest of the country (Figures 3 and 4), a trend that has been underway for more than two decades. For example:

- In the 2016 presidential election, Latino registration grew by 11% over 2012 levels, compared with 5% for Whites and 3% nationally. In the 2018 midterm election, Latino voter registration grew by 21% over 2014 levels, compared with 8% for Whites and 7% nationally. (Figure 3).



Members of UnidosUS Affiliate Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) register voters in San Diego, California.

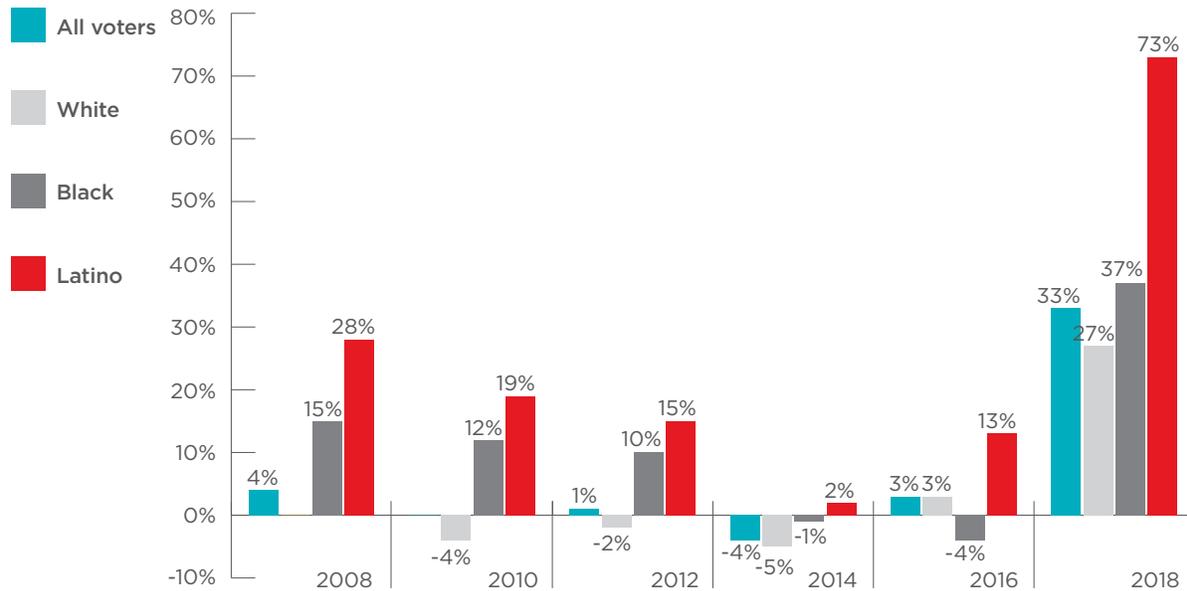
FIGURE 3. Reported Registration Growth Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2008–2018)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018," *Current Population Survey*, Table 2. The rate of growth based on the comparable previous election cycles (i.e., midterm to midterm, presidential to presidential).

- Accordingly, in the 2016 presidential election Latino voter participation grew by 13% over 2012 levels, compared with 1% for Whites and 3% nationally. In the 2018 midterms, Latino voter participation grew by a stunning 73% over 2014 levels, compared with 27% among Whites and 33% nationally (Figure 4).

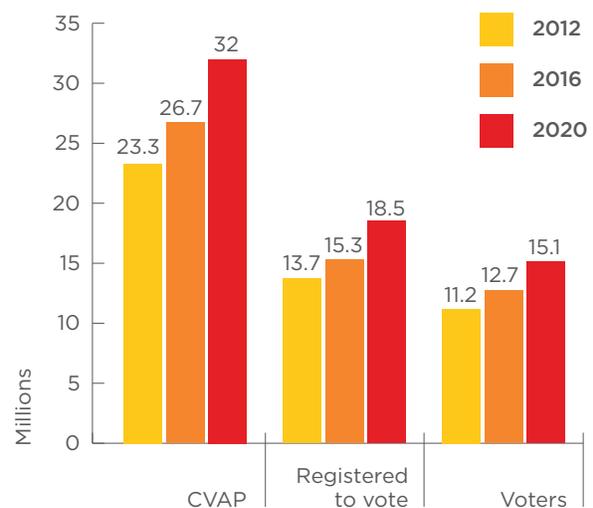
FIGURE 4. Reported Voter Growth Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2008–2018)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018,” *Current Population Survey*, Table 2. The rate of growth based on the comparable previous election cycles (i.e., midterm to midterm, presidential to presidential).

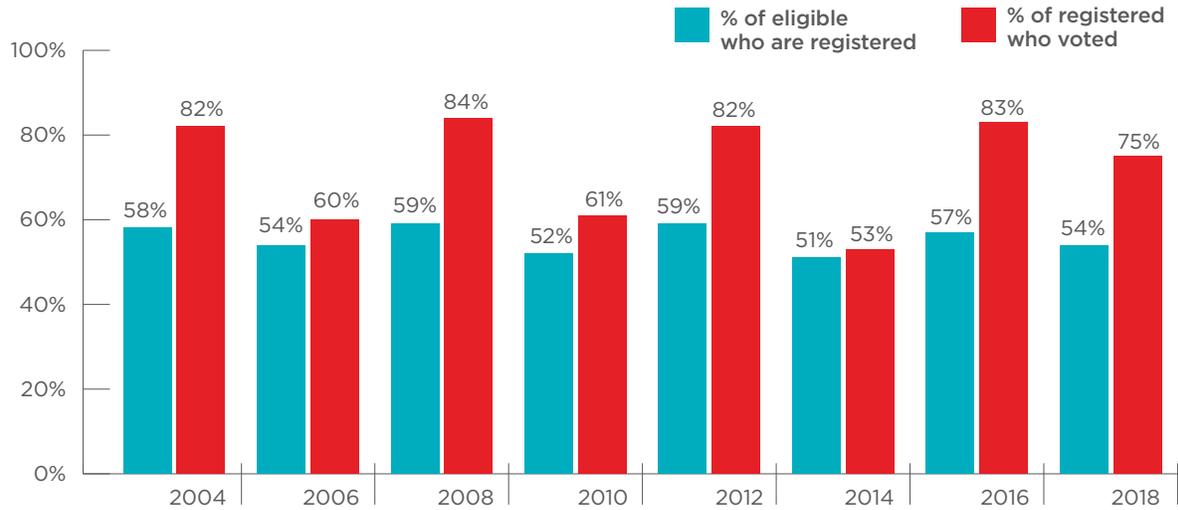
- In the 2016 presidential election 15.3 million Latinos were registered to vote, with 12.7 million casting a ballot. If current rates of naturalization, registration, and voting remain constant, there could be an additional 2.4 million Latino voters casting a ballot in 2020 (Figure 5). This would represent a growth of 19% above 2016 turnout numbers, potentially resulting in 15.1 million Latino voters.
- More than 80% of Latino registered voters regularly participate in presidential cycles, and a record-breaking 75% voted in the 2018 midterm election (Figure 6).

FIGURE 5. Estimated 2020 Latino Electorate



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2012 and 2016,” *Current Population Survey*. Estimates for 2020 by Latino Decisions based on prior population, registration, and turnout trends.

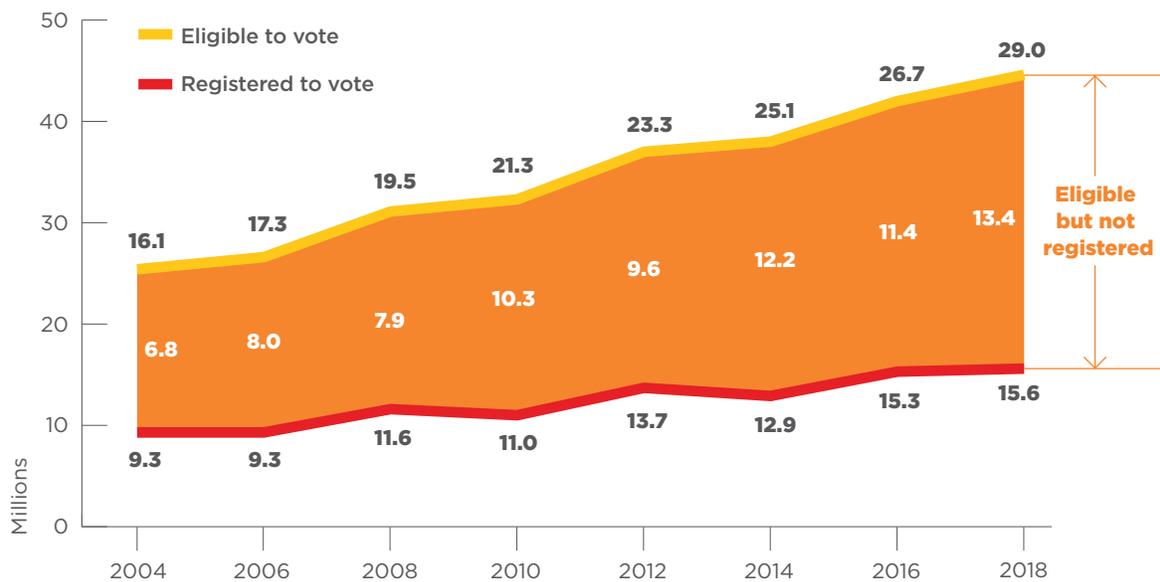
FIGURE 6. Registration Rates Among Latino Citizen Adults and Voter Turnout Among Latino Registered Voters (2004-2018)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018," *Current Population Survey*, Table 2.

- The big gap is in voter registration. More than 40% of Latino citizens of voting age are in need of registration (Figures 6 and 7). The fact that there are more than 13 million eligible-but-not-registered Latinos presents a huge opportunity for organizations vested in building civic participation, as well as for campaigns seeking to expand the electorate and their base of support. Making a dent in the huge Latino voter registration gap will require much more concerted effort and investment. Additionally, more effective methods and practices, combined with public education campaigns and meaningful and culturally competent engagement, are necessary to broaden pathways to registration, including registration in high schools and automatic voter registration, among others.

FIGURE 7. Latino Voter Registration Gap (2004-2018)

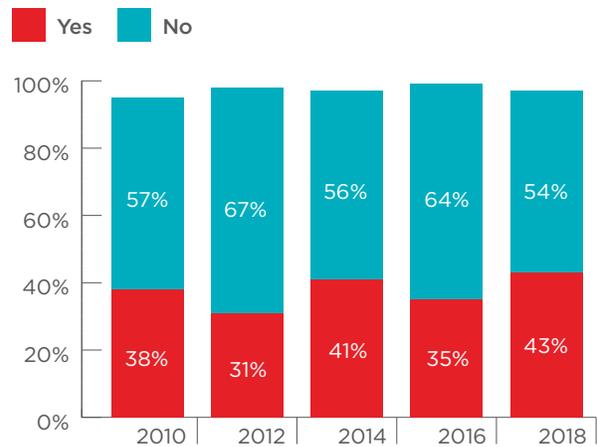


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018," *Current Population Survey*, Table 2.

- Another factor dampening Latino participation is the habitually lackluster outreach from campaigns and candidates to Latino voters. The majority of Latino voters consistently report they are not being contacted by campaigns, parties, or other organizations (Figure 8). If highly-likely-to-vote Latinos—people who actually cast a ballot—are not getting much attention, then infrequent voters and the eligible-but-not-registered are surely receiving even less contact.

FIGURE 8. Latino Voter Contact (2010–2018)

Over the past few months, did a campaign, political party or community advocacy organization ask you to vote or register to vote?



Source: Latino Election Eve Polls 2010–2018 of highly-likely to vote registered Latinos, latinoelectionpolls.com (accessed 12/29/2019).



UnidosUS canvassers receive training in Miami, Florida in 2019.

Latino Influence in the States

Latinos generally exert substantial influence in high-population states in terms of election and policy outcomes. Even in states often considered noncompetitive from a presidential race perspective (such as California, New York, and Texas), their impact can be observed in party primaries, representative diversity, and down-ballot races. The five congressional districts with the largest numbers of eligible Latino voters can be found in districts such as Texas's 20th congressional district, represented by Democrat Rep. Joaquin Castro, which is home to 359,000 Latino eligible voters, the highest number of any congressional district in the country. Texas's 20th is followed by Texas's 16th represented by freshman Democrat Rep. Veronica Escobar, the 34th represented by Democrat Rep. Filemon Vela, and the 23rd district where incumbent Republican William Hurd is not seeking reelection, and where two Latinos are now running to replace him. Additionally, Florida's 26th district, represented by freshman Democrat Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, rounds out the top five districts in the U.S. with the most Latino eligible voters.⁸

In federal level-races in 2020, Latino voters will play a key role in:

- The presidential race in Arizona and Florida, which will be extremely competitive, and the size of the Latino electorate is large enough to be an outcome determinant.
- Competitive U.S. Senate races in Colorado and Arizona, where Latinos account for 15% and 25%, respectively, of those states' citizen voting-age population.
- More than 20 competitive congressional races throughout the country, where the Latino share of the electorate is large enough to determine the winner (Table 1).



Speakers and attendees at the launch event for the UnidosUS *iAdelante!* 2020 Campaign held November 2019 in Washington, DC.

In the Democratic primaries, Latinos played a key role in Senator Bernie Sanders' bid for the nomination, and his wins in California and Nevada. A result of deep and extensive efforts to engage the community, his trajectory confirms once again that where Latino voters are concerned, candidates matter, their positions matter, and meaningful outreach is essential.

A future brief in this series will take a closer look at Latino party affiliation and support, views about candidates, and the key issue priorities these voters would like candidates to address.

TABLE 1. 2020 Competitive Congressional Districts where the Latino Electorate Is Larger than the 2018 Margin of Victory

District	Margin of victory Midterm 2018	Republican vote Midterm 2018	Democratic vote Midterm 2018	% Latino voters in district
Georgia 07	0.2	50.1	49.9	8.8%
Utah 04	0.2	49.9	50.1	10%
California 21	0.8	49.6	50.4	56%
Georgia 06	1	49.5	50.5	5%
New Mexico 02	1.8	49.1	50.9	44%
Pennsylvania 01	2.6	51.3	48.7	12.5%
Texas 21	2.6	50.2	47.6	24.9%
Texas 31	2.9	50.6	47.7	18.2%
Texas 24	3.1	50.6	47.5	14.9%
California 39	3.2	48.4	51.6	28%
California 50	3.4	51.7	48.3	20.1%
California 45	4.2	47.9	52.1	15%
Texas 10	4.3	51.1	46.8	18.5%
California 10	4.6	47.7	52.3	29%
Illinois 14	5	47.5	52.5	8%
Texas 07	5	47.5	52.5	20%
Texas 22	5	51.4	46.4	20.7%
Florida 15	6	53	47	13%
New York 02	6.1	53	46.9	14.1%
Texas 32	6.3	45.9	52.2	14%
New York 11	6.4	46.6	53	13%
California 48	7.2	46.4	53.6	15%
California 25	8.8	45.6	54.4	27%

Source: Latino Decisions analysis of the Cook Political Report House Race Ratings (November 2019) combined with U.S. Census Bureau *Current Population Survey* (2018) and official 2018 election results.

Conclusion

This November, Hispanic Americans will be the largest racial or ethnic minority in the 2020 electorate and a critical factor in the winning equation for the White House, as well as key Senate and House races.

To put the importance of the Latino vote in context for 2020, it was just two years ago that control of the House shifted to Democrats by winning 30 districts that President Trump had won just two years prior, including wins for Democrats in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas where at least 20% of all eligible voters are Latino. In addition, nine U.S. House districts in which Hispanics make up at least 10% of eligible voters changed parties, giving the Democratic candidate a win over a seat previously held by a Republican.⁹ The 2018 midterm saw an unprecedented level of participation by Latino voters, and it is uncertain how the pandemic may shift a similarly unprecedented turnout in 2020.

Polling data show that the size and intensity of Latino turnout will be shaped by the choices voters have, how candidates define themselves on the issues and their outreach, and how unimpeded the path to the voting booth remains. The final number of actual voters—which could reach 15 million but has the potential to be higher if the registration gap is closed—will also depend on investments in and ability to continue voter registration efforts in light of the pandemic, robust outreach, and expansion of safe voting options including vote-by-mail. All are key ingredients to offset the destabilizing and disproportionate impact of coronavirus on the Latino community and how that may detrimentally impact voting.

Endnotes

- 1 Luis Noe-Bustamante, Abby Budiman, and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Where Latinos have the most eligible voters in the 2020 election,” Pew Research Center, January 31, 2020, (accessed July 2020).
- 2 Targetsmart, “An Early Look at the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Voter Registration,” Targetsmart, April 30, 2020, (accessed July 2020).
- 3 U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2013–2017, Table B050031,” American Community Survey.
- 4 NALEO Education Fund, “Naturalization: Helping potential New Americans navigate the citizenship process,” NALEO Education Fund website (accessed July 2020)
- 5 U.S. Census Bureau, Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2018, Table 4b, Current Population Survey, November 2018.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Luis Noe-Bustamante, Abby Budiman, and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Where Latinos have the most eligible voters in the 2020 election,” Pew Research Center, January 31, 2020, (accessed July 2020).
- 9 Jens Manuel Krogstad, Antonio Flores, and Mark Hugo Lopez, “Key takeaways about Latino voters in the 2018 midterm elections,” Pew Research Center, November 9, 2018, (accessed July 2020).

