



### *Élections et processus démocratiques / Elections and democratic processes*

## **Latino Power: The Rising Influence of the U.S. Hispanic Community \***

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In October 2006, the United States of America reached the demographic landmark of 300 million people. Any outsider looking in would notice an increasingly diverse society, which has experienced a dramatic demographic shift in the constitution of its population within the last forty years. Since 1966-67, the U.S. has added an additional 100 million people to its population. Back then the U.S. population was composed of 84% white, 11% black, 4% Hispanic/Latino<sup>1</sup> and 1% Asian and Pacific Islander. Today, these figures have changed considerably within the last two generations partly due to increased immigration from Spanish-speaking countries of the Western Hemisphere who collectively are referred to as Hispanics or Latinos. As a result, "the Hispanic population increased from 8.5 million in 1966-67 to 44.7 million today. Latinos

### ***Le pouvoir latino-américain ou l'influence politique grandissante de la communauté hispanique aux États-Unis***

*English summary on p. 24.*

#### **Résumé:**

*La population américaine s'est grandement transformée depuis les 40 dernières années, notamment en raison de la croissance rapide de la communauté hispanique qui compte dorénavant plus de 40 millions de personnes, ce qui en fait le deuxième groupe démographique en importance aux États-Unis après la majorité blanche. Quels sont les impacts politiques liés à cette nouvelle réalité démographique? Cette note aborde le pouvoir politique de la communauté hispanique aux États-Unis et les conséquences politiques futures liées à sa croissance. L'analyse porte d'abord sur les particularités de ce groupe et sa place dans le discours politique actuel, pour se tourner ensuite sur le vote hispanique et les gains politiques importants réalisés par cette communauté. Le débat sur l'immigration a été un enjeu de mobilisation majeur pour ce groupe et a influencé le résultat du vote à plusieurs endroits en novembre 2006. La communauté hispanique représente un large bassin d'électeurs potentiels et cette réalité ne peut plus être ignorée par les partis politiques. Même si le pouvoir politique actuel de la communauté hispanique est plutôt circonscrit, leur présence est de plus en plus remarquée. Assurément, l'influence latino-américaine deviendra une variable politique majeure aux États-Unis au cours des prochaines années.*

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this paper, the terms *Hispanic* and *Latino* are used interchangeably.

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accounted for 36% of the 100 million added to the population in the last four decades, the most of any racial or ethnic group".<sup>2</sup> This important demographic shift in the American population warrants serious consideration from political scientists who are now posed with a series of questions as to what are the internal political implications of these demographic changes of Canada's largest trading partner and southern neighbor.

Hispanics now have direct influence on the social and economic aspects of the American society but is their political power growing? This note attempts to grasp the real political impact Latinos now have and the one they may obtain in the near future. To this aim, we first analyze what are the demographic particularities of the Hispanic community and what importance Latinos have in domestic political discourse. Subsequently, we summarize how the Hispanic vote has been growing since the two last presidential elections, and what important political gains Latinos have made in recent years. We then present how the actual immigration debate has recently gathered together the community

and impacted Latino political concerns and affiliation. We consequently analyze if the Latino vote in Arizona, which was driven in great part by the immigration debate, had a political impact on the midterm election results for this state. Furthermore, we shall see what the political perspectives are for 2008 and beyond, as the growing Hispanic community increasingly becomes a large pool of potential swing voters in future elections.

## Facts and Figures

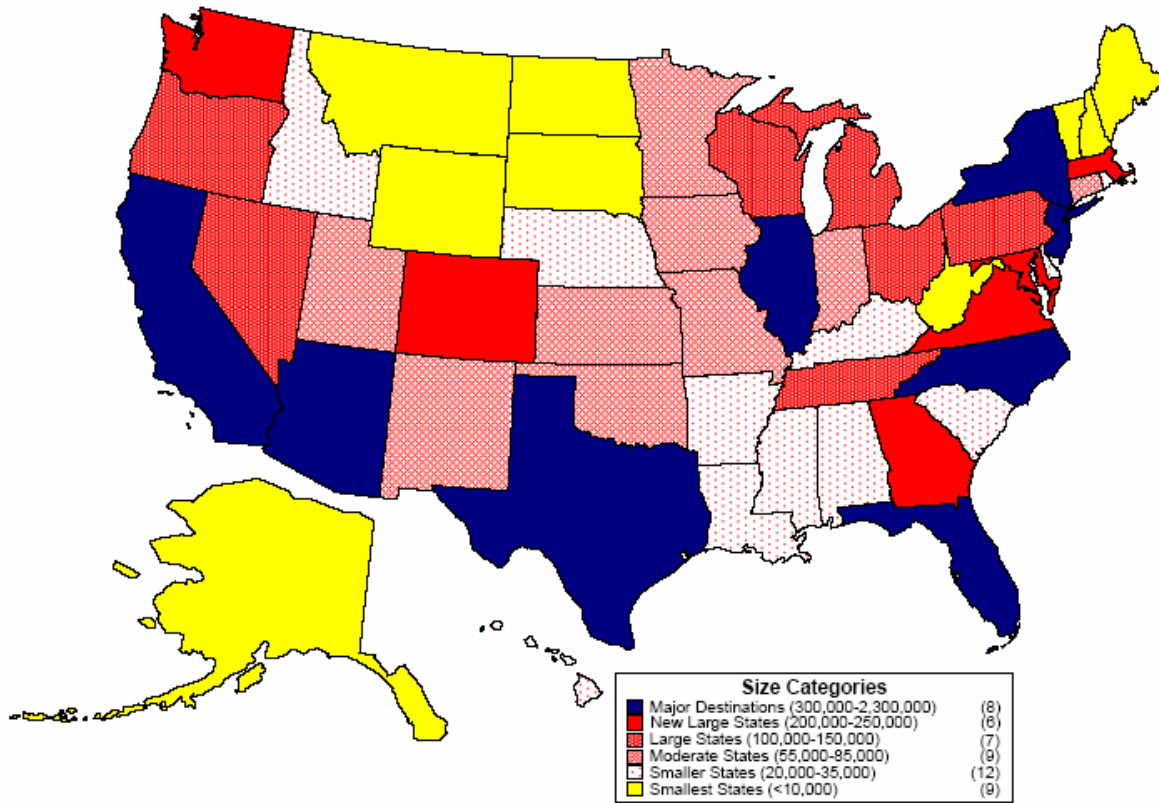
Today, Hispanics are the largest minority group in America (14.5%) replacing African-Americans, the historic minority, and they are growing at an estimate of 1.7 million people a year.<sup>3</sup> Thus, one in eight American is of Hispanic origin. The U.S. Hispanic community has become important not only because of its fast growth and its overall size, but also because they now have a direct social and economical impact in the U.S. There are visible signs of the emergence of the Hispanic culture redefining mainstream American culture: more salsa is now sold than ketchup in the U.S. and more beer is sold on *Cinco the Mayo* than on St-Patrick's day. Jose has replaced Michael as the most popular name for newborns in California and Texas. By 2010, Hispanics will make up for more than half of Los Angeles population.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the increase use of Spanish in daily life, business and politics will make the U.S. the second largest Spanish-speaking country after Mexico within a few years. Undeniably, the Hispanic community is now a major influence in the U.S. and its growth is a reality considered both socially and politically.

But, what is the composition of the U.S. Hispanic community? The roots of the nation's U.S.-born and foreign-born Hispanics are mostly Mexican (64%), Puerto Rican (9%), Cuban (3%), Salvadoran (3%) and Dominican (3%). About 11 million unauthorized migrants are estimated to be living in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2005 American Community Survey*.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge" in *Foreign Policy*

<sup>2</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, *From 200 million to 300 Million: The Numbers behind Population Growth*, p.1



**Graph 1: Unauthorized Population in the United States: 2002-2004<sup>5</sup>.**

Of these, about 57% are from Mexico whereas the rest of Latin America accounts approximately for one-quarter of this total population.<sup>6</sup> Hispanic youth accounts for more than 34% of the total U.S. Hispanic population, which represents more than 18% of the total U.S. youth population. The median age for the Latino population is 27.2, compared to 36.4 for the overall US population.<sup>7</sup> From 2000 to 2004, the Hispanic population increased 14% in contrast to the non-Hispanic population, which increased only 2% during the same time period.<sup>8</sup> By 2020, Hispanic youth will make up 23% of all U.S. youth.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Website of the Pew Hispanic Center: [www.pewhispanic.org](http://www.pewhispanic.org)

<sup>6</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics”, p.4

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *2005 American Community Survey*.

<sup>8</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Hispanics at Mid-Decade”, Table 1, p.1

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Ibid.*

Therefore, the Hispanic community is not only growing because of the large number of newcomers arriving in the U.S., but also because it is a young population with a higher fertility rate than the total U.S. population. Conversely, Hispanics are the only demographic group who give birth to enough children to replace themselves and increase their numbers over time in the general population (the Hispanic fertility rate being 2.82 while the replacement value is 2.1).

Although the largest Hispanic populations are still mostly located in the south where they have a profound historic and cultural influence, Latinos reside throughout the United States and contribute to a larger expansion of the Hispanic community from the west to the east coast. The 5 states with the largest Hispanic population are California (12 523 379), Texas (7 903 079), Florida (3 414 414), New York (3 028 658) and Illinois (1 804 619); the ones with the largest percentage of Hispanics are the southern states of New Mexico (43.6%), California and Texas (35.5%),

Arizona (28.6%) and Nevada (23.7%).<sup>10</sup> But surprisingly, the states with the fastest-growing Hispanic populations are not the traditional ones close to the southern border; they are North Dakota, Arkansas, South Carolina and Tennessee.<sup>11</sup> It seems that there is now a dispersion of the Latino community from its traditional ports of entry. Consequently, in 2005, Hispanics have outnumbered African and Asian-Americans in 26 of the 50 states.

**Graph 2: 26 States Where Latinos are Largest Minority Group (2005)<sup>12</sup>**



The composition of the Hispanic community is complex because “they are at once a new and an old population made up both of recently arrived new comers and old timers with deeper roots on American soil [...]; it can claim both historical and territorial roots in what is now the United States that preceded the establishment of the nation in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, it is a population that seems to have emerged suddenly, its growth driven by accelerating immigration from the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America, above all from Mexico which shares a 2000 miles continuous

border with the U.S.”<sup>13</sup> Hispanics as a whole are not a homogenous entity. It is an amalgamation of distinct, yet closely related, communities. Mexicans, Cubans, Salvadorians and other nationalities from Latin America and Spain often embrace the Latino or Hispanic cultural identity upon their arrival in the United States. Despite their differences, millions in the U.S. identify themselves as Hispanics or Latinos, and it is only in the U.S. that this catch-all label has a specific meaning, which continues to evolve as this community grows.<sup>14</sup>

### Hispanics and Voting

As mentioned earlier, the Hispanic community ranges an estimated 40 to 45 million U.S. residents and accounts for half of the population growth between the 2000 and 2004 elections. These statistics could lead us to believe that an increase in Hispanic vote cast is a corollary of a growing population. However, according to the data of the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics accounted for only one-tenth of the increase in the total vote cast. This causes a gap between the very substantial growth of the Hispanic population and the much more modest growth of the Hispanic electoral clout. This gap has been developing for a generation, but has widened considerably in the recent years. “It is primarily the result of the two key demographic factors that distinguish Latinos from whites and blacks in the electoral arena: a high percentage of Hispanics are either too young to vote or ineligible because they are not citizens”.<sup>15</sup> Hence, does the actual Hispanic population in the U.S. have a substantive political power? In order to answer this question, we will see how many Hispanics voted in the 2004 election and what political

<sup>10</sup> Idem

<sup>11</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Hispanics at Mid-Decade”, Table 10, p.11

<sup>12</sup> Tomas Rivera Policy Institute, *Analysis of US Census Bureau Data, 1970, 1990, 2000, 2005.*

<sup>13</sup> Rubén G. Rumbaut, “The Making of a People” in *Hispanics and the Future of America*, p.16-17

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.18

<sup>15</sup> Idem

gains they have made in recent years. We will also analyze how important issues, like the current immigration debate, can potentially mobilize the Hispanic political power and affiliation.

### *The 2004 election and recent political gains*

The Latino population has generally grown with each election since 1996. “The combination of demographic factors and participation rates meant that 18% of the total Latino population (including adults as well as children, citizens and non-citizens alike) went to the polls in 2004, compared with 51% of all whites and 39% of all blacks”.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Hispanics accounted for only 6% of the total vote cast, up from 5.5% four years earlier. Meanwhile, the Hispanic share of the population rose from 12.8% to 14.3% in the same time period. The growth of the population was so strong between 2000 and 2004 that despite the demographic factors; it nonetheless contributed to a modest increase of the overall Hispanic electorate share.

The turnout of the 2004 election showed a growing political presence of the Latino electorate, which resulted in several gains in public offices. Senator Ken Salazar in Colorado and Senator Mel Martinez in Florida were the first Latinos to represent their respective states in the U.S. Senate, and the first Hispanics to serve in the U.S. Senate since 1977. In Colorado, former state representative John Salazar, older brother of Ken Salazar, was elected to represent Colorado’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District, becoming Colorado’s first Latino in the House of Representatives. Also, in the states lower houses, the number of Latinos legislators increased from 161 to 171. Several states with smaller but growing Hispanic communities (Connecticut, Michigan and New Hampshire) gained an additional Latino legislator, as did Arizona, California and New York. Furthermore, Kansas, Utah and Rhode Island each added two additional

Latinos to their respective states legislatures.<sup>17</sup>

Latinos political gains after 2004 are notable as well. On the municipal scene, in 2005, former California State Assembly Speaker and Los Angeles City Council Member Antonio Villaraigosa was elected mayor of the nation’s second largest city, and home of over 1.8 million Latinos: Los Angeles. Moreover, the Latino power is also noteworthy outside of the southwestern states. In New Jersey, U.S. Representative Bob Menendez was appointed at the end of 2005 to serve as Senator for the remaining term of newly elected Governor John Corzine. Menendez was the first Latino to represent New Jersey in the U.S. Senate and was subsequently elected by his own right for a full six-year term in the 2006 mid-term election. Besides, the growing field presidential candidates for the 2008 election includes the popular two-term Democrat Governor of New Mexico, Bill Richardson Lopez, the country’s first serious Hispanic presidential candidate, who provides another example of the Latino emergence in the national political scene.

### *Mobilizing the Latino vote: the Immigration Debate*

Albeit the Hispanic share of the electorate remains small after the 2004 elections, Hispanic political preferences and participation are closely watched because of the fast demographic growth of the community. Recently, the divisive immigration debate in Congress has largely mobilized Latino public opinion. Following the House measures aiming to strengthen border enforcement and make illegal immigrants liable to criminal prosecution in December 2005, protests and marches were organized nationwide and resulted in the Senate passing a compromised bill which included “some stepped-up enforcement measures and a legalization program whose greatest benefits would go to unauthorized

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<sup>16</sup> Idem

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<sup>17</sup> NALEO Educational Fund, *2006 Latino Election Handbook*, p.1

migrants who have been in the country for at least 5 years".<sup>18</sup>

Participants in the pro-immigration rallies that took place last spring across the U.S. chanted "Today we march, tomorrow we vote". Even though immigration comes after education and economy as the third most important issue for the Latino community, the actual immigration debate and the mobilization around it has had a significant political impact in mid-term elections.<sup>19</sup> Exit polls conducted by the National Election Poll indicates that a 62% majority of voters considered illegal immigration to be either extremely or very important, but that this issue was outweighed by the economy, Iraq, terrorism and corruption.<sup>20</sup> Willing to sort out the illegal immigration problem and making it one of his campaign issues, President Bush signed, on October 26<sup>th</sup> 2006, a measure authorizing the construction of a fence along 700 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, an action that conflicts with his own stated vision of immigration reform, but one championed by many Republicans facing re-election in November. Speaking at the White House, President Bush said that "the barrier will help the United States plug the porous Southwest border" and portrayed the measure as "a key step toward comprehensive immigration reform."<sup>21</sup> This policy battle, consistent with the measures putted forward by Republican Party (GOP) in the last year, was bitterly received not only in states where illegal immigration is a reality, but also south of the border. The Secure Fence Act has created a deep resentment among the Mexican population, but also within the international community. A statement by Mexico signed by 27 other members of the Organization of American States expressed concern about the bill, calling it "a unilateral measure that goes against the spirit of understanding that

should characterize how shared problems between neighboring countries are handled and that affects cooperation in the hemisphere."<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the White House announced an extensive Latin American tour on part of President Bush that took place in March of 2007, to help reconcile to one extent or the other the damage caused by this controversial measure.

It is still unclear what will be the impact of the immigrant marches and the recent border enforcement measures on the Hispanic political agenda. Yet, the 2006 National Survey of Latinos showed that "63% of Latinos surveyed think that the pro-immigrant marches signal the beginning of a new and lasting social movement. A majority (58%) now believes Hispanics are working together to achieve common goals, a marked increase from 2002, when 43% expressed confidence in Latino unity".<sup>23</sup> The potential growth of the Latino political participation and the community's political empowerment that may result from this event should be viewed in the context of the steady political gains made in the last two decades. The mobilization of the Latino community around the immigration debate may serve as a catalyst for the continuing momentum of Latino political progress.<sup>24</sup> Unquestionably, as the Latino population grows, gains will continue. In Nebraska, for example, Hispanic voters will comprise a significant portion of Nebraska's vote by 2030 and could swing an election, regardless of any changes to U.S. immigration policy.<sup>25</sup> Thousands of Nebraskan Latinos joined the millions of marchers who participated in immigration rallies nationwide this spring.

#### *Latino Party Affiliation*

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<sup>18</sup> *Idem*

<sup>19</sup> John Zogby, "Hispanic Perspectives, submitted to The National Council of la Raza", p. 6

<sup>20</sup> David R. Ayón, "Immigration and the 2006 Elections", *U.S.-Mexico Policy Bulletin*, p.3

<sup>21</sup> Michael A. Fletcher and Jonathan Weisman, "Bush Signs Bill Authorizing 700-Mile Fence for Border", *The Washington Post* (October 27, 2006).

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<sup>22</sup> *Idem*.

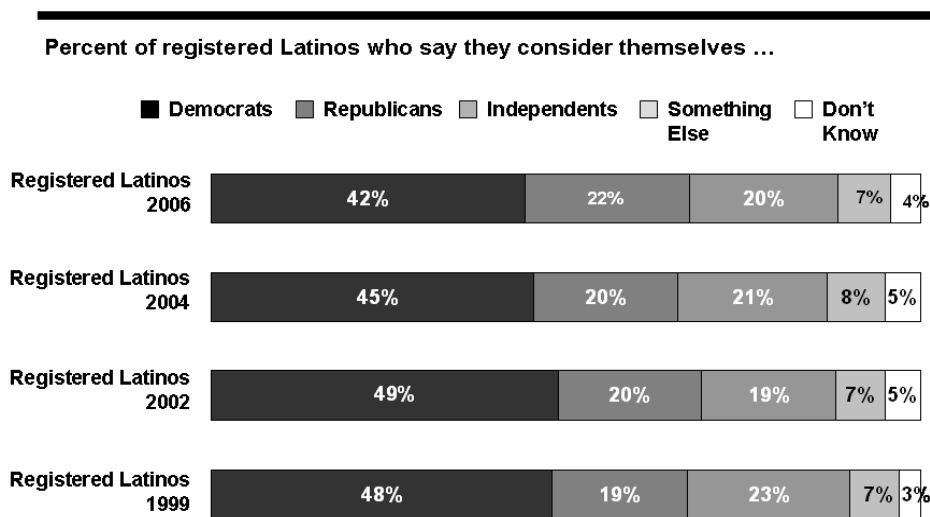
<sup>23</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, "2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate", p.ii

<sup>24</sup> NALEO Educational Fund, *Ibid*, p. 2

<sup>25</sup> "Hispanic vote could swing elections by 2030", *Sioux City Journal* (October 31 2006)  
[www.siouxcityjournal.com/articles/2006/10/28/news/nebraska/6833a1fc9d19253a862572150011bdc8.txt](http://www.siouxcityjournal.com/articles/2006/10/28/news/nebraska/6833a1fc9d19253a862572150011bdc8.txt)

According to a Pew Hispanic Center analysis of exit poll data, “President Bush made important gains among Latinos in the 2004 presidential election, capturing 40% of their vote, up from 34% in 2002 and the best share recorded for a Republican presidential nominee. The exit polls showed that 27% of Latino voters in 2004 identified themselves as Republican, a higher mark than the GOP has recorded among registered voters in any of the Center’s surveys”.<sup>26</sup> Some inroads with Latino voters were made but has the Republican Party been able to secure and expand these gains among Hispanics?

**Table 1: Party Affiliation of Registered Latino Voters<sup>27</sup>**



Although the immigration debate has divided the Republican Party and many Latinos hold the Republicans responsible for what they perceive to be the negative consequences of

the immigration debate, it seems that measures for party identification have been steady overtime. “The share of Latinos identifying with the Democrats is down from 49% in 2002 to 42% in the most recent survey (June-July 2006), which suggests an erosion of support to the Democratic Party in recent years. However, the Republicans show no significant gains, with the share at 20% in 2002 and 22% in the current survey”.<sup>28</sup>

There is modest change in how Latinos align themselves on a partisan level and Latinos continue to demonstrate that they will support candidates from both political parties. “Shifts in party affiliation between 2004 and 2006 did not uniformly favor one party with Republicans making modest gains in Arizona and New Mexico and Democrats slight gains in New York. The share of Latinos affiliated with neither party increased in Arizona, Colorado, Florida and New Mexico.”<sup>29</sup> The question of how Latinos align themselves on a partisan level is quite complex and this creates opportunities for both political parties to continue to refine their strategies for reaching and winning the growing share of Hispanic voters.

**The 2006 Mid-Term Election and the Hispanic vote**

The mid-term election of November 2006 was crucial: the balance of power was at stake in both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. All 435 U.S. House seat were up for election. Democrats needed to pick up 15 seats to take control of the House, two Republican seats and one Democrat seat were vacant. Republican leaders anticipated to a minimum that they would lose 7, 10 or possibly 12 seats in the House and closer to

<sup>26</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate”, p.12

<sup>27</sup> Pew Hispanic Center *2006 National Survey of Latinos*, conducted June 5 – July 3, 2006; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation *National Survey of Latinos: Politics and Civic Engagement*, July 2004 (conducted April – June 2004); Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation *National Survey of Latinos: The Latino Electorate*, October 2002 (conducted April – June 2002); Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard *National Survey on Latinos in America*, January 2000 (conducted July – August 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.23

<sup>29</sup> NALEO Educational Fund, Ibid, p.1

the Election Day, their worst-case scenarios jumped from losing 20 seats to losing 35. There were 33 Senate races this year, with Democrats defending 18 seats and Republicans defending 15. Democrats needed to win 6 seats to capture the Senate and enough races were in the toss-up category to make that possible, although this was estimated to be more difficult than taking back the House.<sup>30</sup> A troublesome war in Iraq, an unpopular president, recurring scandals and corruption accusations gave a hard time to the Republican candidates. “Just as Democrats found in 1980 and 1994, when the national climate was very much against them and voters refused to give them the benefit of the doubt, the GOP has found how difficult it is to make headway, no matter how much money it pumps into competitive races”.<sup>31</sup>

election. Nationally, the Hispanic share of the electorate for 2006 increased to 8.6% from 8.2% in 2004”<sup>33</sup>.

Although this doesn’t represent a large increase over the last two years, changes are noteworthy in the way Latino voters aligned themselves to either party during the 2006 mid-term election. “The national exit poll showed that in elections for the U.S. House of Representatives 69% of Latinos voted for Democrats and 30% for Republicans. An analysis of exit polls in Senate and gubernatorial races around the country that produced a national estimate revealed essentially the same partisan preference”.<sup>34</sup> These polls suggest a substantial gain for Democrats compared to the numbers showed in the 2004 exit polls. “Comparing exit polls from 2004 and 2006 suggests an 11 point swing in favor of the Democrats while the swing among white voters was only 6%. This comparison suggests that the movement away from the GOP was greater among Latinos than whites.

**Table 2: Comparison Table for the 2002-2004-2006 Elections: Voting by Race/Ethnicity**<sup>32</sup>

	Voting by race/ethnicity 2006-2004-2002							
	2006 National Exit Poll		2004 State Exit Poll		2002 National Exit Poll		Change In Democratic Vote	
	D	R	D	R	D	R	06-04	06-02
Whites	47	51	41	58	38	57	+6	+9
Hispanics	69	30	58	40	61	37	+11	+8
Blacks	89	10	86	13	89	9	+3	0

*Source: Exit polls conducted by VNS (2002), NEP (1004, 2006)*

Is such a significant point shift to the Democrats unique to the Hispanic community? A comparison with the 2002 mid-term election offers another point of view: Comparing this year’s election to the 2002 election shows that Democrat gains among Latinos and whites were roughly similar. Hence, comparison of the last two-midterm elections suggests

In 2006, “more than 17 million Hispanics were U.S. citizens over the age of 18 and thus, eligible to vote for the mid-term election. This represents an increase of 7% over the 2004

that Latinos did not behave distinctively from other voters in 2006, but simply rode the Democratic wave and followed broader political trends that were also evident within the rest of the electorate.

Albeit Latinos still represented a small share of the electorate nationwide (8.6%) in 2006,

<sup>30</sup> “Bellwethers: Key Issues in the Battle for Congress”, *The Washington Post*, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/bellwether/index.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/bellwether/index.htm)

<sup>31</sup> Charlie Cook, *The Cook Political Report* (October 31, 2006) [www.cookpolitical.com/](http://www.cookpolitical.com/)

<sup>32</sup> Website of the Pew Hispanic Center: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/26.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Latinos and the 2006 Election”, p.1

<sup>34</sup> *Idem.*



some highly competitive races occurred in districts or states with a substantial Hispanic population. In New Mexico's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District, where Hispanics made up 38% of the electorate, Heather Wilson, the Republican incumbent, narrowly defeated Patricia Madrid, the state's popular Hispanic Attorney General. Statewide, in New Mexico, Latinos voted 81% for Democratic House candidates.<sup>35</sup> However, in California's 11<sup>th</sup> district, where Latinos made up 16% of eligible voters, the Republican incumbent was defeated. In Colorado's 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, with 16% of Latino voters, and Texas 22<sup>nd</sup> District, with 17% of Latino voters, Democrats also won open seats that were previously held by Republicans.<sup>36</sup> Arizona, where Latinos account for 17% of eligible voters, was seen by many as a test case on voter's sentiment towards immigration. In this state with a sizeable Latino electorate, did the Hispanic vote, which was mostly driven by the immigration debate, influence the outcome of the election? Illegal immigration was the main campaign issue in Arizona's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. Analyzing this particular race may reveal the political impact Latinos can have in districts where they have a deep influence.

#### *A Key race in Arizona 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District*

Arizona is the home of America's oldest continuous community, the Hopi Indians, and at the same time, it is one of America's fastest growing and changing states. It has grown from 700 000 people at the end of World War II to 3.6 million in 1990 and subsequently, to 5.6 million in 2003. It is now a modern state where technology and progress have been determining factors in the growth of the economy. This sense of innovation and openness is reflected on the political landscape. Arizona elected a woman governor in 2002, Janet Napolitano, and in 1998 it became the first state to elect women to all of

its top five statewide executive offices; all but Napolitano were Republicans. It is one of the relatively few states with more registered Republicans than Democrats.

In 2004, more than one in four (28.1%) Arizonians were Latinos and nearly 300 000 of them voted in the 2004 general election.<sup>37</sup> In Arizona, where an estimated 400 000 Latino immigrants have risked their lives crossing the Sonoran desert out of the million-odd immigrants who enter America annually, the immigration topic is a sensible one. Often referred as "ground zero" for illegal immigration, Arizona is the home of 450 000 undocumented residents out of a population of 5.9 million, the highest percentage of illegal residents of all American states.<sup>38</sup> More undocumented immigrants are crossing the south border of Arizona than California, Texas and New Mexico combined.

Many saw illegal immigration as a burning issue in mid-term election. It was definitely one in Arizona's 5<sup>th</sup> District. Incumbent J.D. Hayworth (R) and his challenger Harry Mitchell (D) have both been campaigning on the subject of illegal immigration and their different perspectives on immigration policy soon became a key issue during the campaign. The battle between Scottsdale Republican Congressman Hayworth, author of *Whatever It Takes: Illegal immigration, Border Security and War on Terror* (a burning tome on the issue advocating for tougher security at the border) and former Tempe mayor Mitchell, partisan of a more comprehensive approach, was soon ranked as a toss-up. Ultimately, Latinos, who accounted for 17% of eligible voters, did not support Hayworth's views and he was ousted by its voters (46%-51%) in a district that was considered relatively safe for Republicans. Even the *Arizona Republic*, a highly conservative newspaper, denounced Hayworth's candidacy for the first time since his election in 1994. The newspaper noted that immigration was a priority for Arizona voters, but harshly criticized Hayworth for blocking a realistic and comprehensive reform: "The 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> American Enterprise for Public Policy Research, "[AEI Political Report](#)", Volume 2, Issue 11, December 2006, p.3

<sup>36</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, "[Latinos and the 2006 Mid-term Election](#)", p.4

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<sup>37</sup> NALEO Educational Fund, *Ibid*, p.11

<sup>38</sup> Michael A. Fletcher and Jonathan Weisman, *Ibid*.

District needs a bridge-builder, not a bomb-thrower”, concluded the Republic by endorsing Mitchell who won his bid.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 3: Mid-Term Election Results for Arizona’s 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District<sup>40</sup>**

Results : Arizona District #5				
Party	Candidate	Votes	%	
D	Harry MITCHELL	73,762	51	★
R	J.D. HAYWORTH	67,830	46	
LB	Warren SEVERIN	4,754	3	

South of the 5<sup>th</sup> district, Democrat candidate Gabrielle Giffords also defeated another hardliner on illegal immigration, Republican Randy Graf, in the 8th Congressional District.

Nevertheless, among these Democrat gains in Arizona, the Republican Senator Jon Kyl, who played a significant role in the immigration debate last spring stressing on tougher enforcement measures and opposing proposals on legalization programs for undocumented immigrants, was easily re-elected. According to the exit polls, he carried 41% of the Hispanic vote, a share comparable to Bush’s in the 2004 election.<sup>41</sup> Clearly, the election did not eliminate the nation’s deep divisions over what to do about illegal immigration. Congressional races in Arizona showed illegal immigration to be not so much a magic carpet as a rusty grenade, explosive and tricky to handle for both parties. In the end, tough talks on the subject seem to have turned off many Hispanic voters, as they overwhelmingly plumped for Democrat candidates by a margin of seven to three, an

increase with respect to the six to four margin of the 2004 presidential election.<sup>42</sup>

Interviewed prior to Election Day, the Executive Director of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund, Arturo Vargas, mentioned: “As Latino voters make their decision on Election Day, they will be looking at candidates’ positions on the same issues that American care about: education, health and the economic opportunities available for their families and communities. But Latinos also want to ensure that their voices are heard during America’s intense national discussion about the future of our immigration policy. Latinos are deeply concerned about the tone and the tenor of campaign debates about immigration, and they will not stand for candidates who use the issue in a divisive or inflammatory manner”.<sup>43</sup> The defeat of Republican candidates Hayworth and Graf confirm this statement. However, because the issue is such a scorching one, no candidates can run a pro-immigration campaign in Arizona. As a result, local Democrats there opposed an amnesty for illegal immigrants, asserted that the border must be fixed and blamed the Republicans for failure to do so. By using illegal immigration and underlining the Republican incompetence in finding a comprehensive way to deal with the issue, the Democrats bought themselves a pass to Washington but it will soon expire. Not dealing with the illegal immigration issue it is likely to backfire on them in the upcoming polls, as the campaign for the 2008 elections has already started in earnest with almost weekly announcements of new candidates announcing their bids for the White House.

The 2006 election showed the Hispanic’s disenchantment by the way the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress previously handled the immigration debate. Because of this obvious disappointment and of the overall Latino support for

<sup>39</sup> “Mitchell over the bully”, *The Arizona Republic* cited in David R. Ayón, *Immigration and the 2006 Elections*, p.5  
<sup>40</sup> Website of CBS:

<http://election.cbsnews.com/campaign2006/state.shtm?state=AZ>

<sup>41</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, “Latinos and the 2006 Mid-term Election”, p.3

<sup>42</sup> “The rusty grenade”, *The Economist*, November 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> 2006, Volume 381, p.32

<sup>43</sup> NALEO Press Release, *Latino Will Determine Outcome Of Crucial Races For Top Positions In Election 2006*, <http://www.naleo.org/pr1031a06.html>

legalization of illegal immigrant workers, the use of illegal immigration as a campaign issue could, in the near future, become an obstacle as the Hispanic vote is growing.<sup>44</sup> The results of races in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional districts in Arizona demonstrates that the way Latinos voters will now align themselves on this issue will be determining, as the recent mid-term election have consequently raised the expectations in immigrant communities for a real reform. The next two years will be a test not only for the new Democrat controlled Congress, but also for aspiring presidential candidates, like Arizona Senator John McCain, who will have to find comprehensive alternatives to scare tactics in order to capture the rising Latino vote and retain votes from those who are deeply concerned with the illegal immigration issue.

## Conclusion

*Is there a Hispanic political influence in current American Politics?*

Today, nobody can deny the demographic importance of the U.S. Hispanic community. They are now the largest minority and their continuous growth is secured for the foreseeable future. Their social and economic influence is also unquestionable, but when it comes to current politics, can we say that Latino power exists? As we have seen in this paper, Latinos are more than ever involved into the political field. Since the 2004 election, their share of the electorate has slowly, but steadily grown and important gains have been made at the federal, state and local level. Furthermore, the youth as well as the adult Hispanic population have recently mobilized around the immigration debate. By taking part in the immigrant marches in the spring of 2006, Latinos have unified, empowered by together showing their concern about an issue that touches them directly. Many observers have mentioned that this common action could eventually lead to a potential growth of the Latino political participation.

In the last mid-term election, many key races were taking place in districts with important Hispanic populations. The way Latinos align themselves on a partisan level was crucial for the outcome of some of these races. The race in Arizona's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District showed not only the significance of the immigration debate, but also foreshadowed the political influence Latinos can hope to acquire by taking a common position on a particular issue and aligning their votes consequently. In sum, Latinos as a demographic group may still have a minor political impact, but their presence and their involvement in the political arena is gradually progressing. Concordantly, their political success will depend on opportunities they will create or be given to get involved in the civil society.

*Political Perspectives: What could be the future impact of the Hispanic vote?*

While nationwide, the Hispanic share of the electorate remains small with a moderate increase of only approximately 8.6% from 8.2% in 2004, Hispanic political preferences and participation are closely watched because as a group, "Hispanics are the only fast-growing share of the electorate"<sup>45</sup>, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by political parties who see their respective futures tied to the U.S. Hispanic community. Both Republicans and Democrats now work on acquiring votes from this large pool of voters for future elections. As this community continues to grow, politicians will increase their presence in Spanish media to get their message to Latino voters. In May 2001, President Bush addressed the nation in Spanish on the occasion of *Cinco de Mayo*.<sup>46</sup> This address was carried by seven radio stations in Miami-Dade and Broward counties, and by more than 100 stations around the nation. It asserted his appreciation of Hispanic culture, and his desire for immigrants to be treated with

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<sup>45</sup> Pew Hispanic Center, 2006 National Survey of Latinos: The Immigration Debate, p. 6

<sup>46</sup> The White House, Radio Address of the President to the Nation, May 5 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/05/20010505-1.html>

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<sup>44</sup> David R. Ayón, *Immigration and the 2006 Elections*, p. 5.

respect. This may have been the first ever address in Spanish by a U.S. President, but as the U.S. Hispanic community keeps growing by approximately more than 1.7 million a year, it is certainly not the last one. The overall impact of the U.S. Hispanic community on the historic demographic shift in the last forty years has now begun to change the political climate and discourse of the American society by adding a whole new level of factors related to the Hispanic reality. Much remains to be observed concerning the Latino power, since most of the Hispanics are either too young to vote or ineligible because of their citizenship status. But now, with a power shift in Congress that may have laid the basis for a bipartisan action on immigration, changes could occur sooner than later, and Latinos will definitely let their voices be heard in the process, as they did when they chanted “today we march tomorrow we vote” during the immigration marches last spring.

## **Latino Power: The Rising Political Influence of the U.S. Hispanic Community**

### **Abstract**

*The U.S. population has experienced a dramatic demographic shift in the constitution of its population within the last forty years. These changes are partly due to increased immigration from Spanish-speaking countries of the Western Hemisphere, who is collectively referred to as Hispanics or Latinos. There are more than 40 million Latinos in the U.S., and the Hispanic community is now the second largest demographic group in the country after the white majority. What are the political consequences of this new demographic reality? This paper attempts to grasp the real political impact Latinos now have and the one they may obtain in the near future. We will first analyze the characteristics of this demographic group and the importance Latinos have in the current political discourse. We will then explain how Hispanics have mobilized around the actual immigration debate, and how this empowerment has influenced Latino political concerns and affiliation during the last mid-term Election in 2006. The U.S. Hispanic community represents a large pool of potential voters, a fact that has not gone unnoticed by political parties who see their respective futures tied to the U.S. Hispanic community. To this day, Latino political power remains small nationwide, but the presence of Hispanics on the political scene is constantly growing. Undoubtedly, the Latino power will become a political reality within the next few years, the young and growing Hispanic community being more than ever mobilized around important national political issues.*

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