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CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY CALIFORNIA

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1. Latino Citizenship and Participation in California Politics

California is home to more than one-third of the United States Latino population, and this population is increasing rapidly.[1] In 1990, the statewide population of Latinos was 7,775,200; by 1996, this number had risen to 9,102,000. Within the next few decades, Latinos will constitute the largest single racial/ethnic group in the state.

This dramatic increase in population suggests that Latinos should also have enjoyed an increase in political power. However, during this same period, the issues discussed in the California state capital and the initiatives passed in its precincts concerned eliminating affirmative action in public hiring and school admissions, denying public education and health care to the children of illegal immigrants, and eliminating bilingual education. Because these issues do not reflect the Latino agenda and may, in fact, be contrary to it (de la Garza, 1996; Uhlaner, 1996; Verba et al., 1995), they provide irrefutable evidence that the political power of Latinos has not been commensurate with their numbers.

In a representative democracy, voting is both the primary means by which citizens acquire political power and the fundamental way in which they exercise it. Yet, researchers have repeatedly found relatively low voter turnout rates among Latinos. For example, Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet (1989) observed that, in California, only 60 percent of the eligible Latinos voted in 1984, compared with 76 percent of their white counterparts (p. 198). Participants in the electoral process are predominantly white, middle-aged or older, employed, of higher income, and of higher educational attainment (Stanley and Niemi, 1995, pp. 79–80).[2] As a result, many elected officials "are not descriptively representative of the populations from which they are drawn. Instead, they are more likely to be male, affluent, educated, and of the dominant racial and ethnic

[1] The words Hispanic and Latino have been used interchangeably in the literature to name a person of Latin-American origin living in the United States. For the sake of consistency, we have chosen to use the word Latino throughout this paper, except, of course, when we are quoting directly from another source.

[2] In the 1992 presidential election, for example, 70 percent of whites, 64 percent of blacks, and 35 percent of Latinos turned out to vote. Forty-eight percent of those aged 18 through 20 turned out, 55 percent of those aged 21 through 24 turned out, and 75 percent of those aged 45 through 64 turned out. Seventy percent of the employed voted, but only 54 percent of the unemployed did so. Forty-four percent of those

groups" (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995, p. 165), which may help to explain why the issues these public officials discuss and the laws they enact often do not coincide with the interests and preferences of Latinos.

But the balance of political power may be shifting. There is growing anecdotal evidence that Latino participation and influence in California politics are increasing. For example, in 1996, Sally Morales Havice (East Los Angeles), Deborah Ortiz (Sacramento), and Tony Cardenas (San Fernando Valley) were all elected to the state Assembly. Recently, a Latino caucus of seventeen California legislators has been flexing its political muscle in Sacramento. In 1996, Cruz Bustamante, a Democrat from Fresno, became the first Latino speaker of the Assembly; and in February 1998, he was succeeded by another Latino, Antonio Villaraigosa, a Democrat from Los Angeles. In that same year, Democrat Loretta Sanchez became the first Latina to represent Orange County in the nation's capital when she defeated Republican Bob Dornan in California's 46th congressional district.

In addition, the issues of immigration and affirmative action may have awakened what some political observers have called "a sleeping giant" and energized previously apathetic Latino voters, causing many young Latinos to express their political opinions by demonstrating and many Latino immigrants to become citizens and acquire the right to vote.[3] For example, the *Marchistas* walked from Sacramento to San Diego to protest Proposition 209, the initiative to prohibit preferential treatment based on race, sex, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, education, and contracting; and youth leaders in the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) in San Diego County organized demonstrations against Proposition 187, the initiative to deny certain publicly funded social and health care services to illegal immigrants and to prevent their enrollment in tax-supported educational institutions. At the time of the last mayoral election in Los Angeles, one in three adult residents was not a citizen. Now, nearly half

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with eight or fewer years of education voted, while 85 percent of those with at least four years of college did so. The turnout percentages are typical for national elections (Stanley and Niemi, 1995, pp. 79–80).

[3] George Skelton, in his Political Journal column entitled "A Wake-Up Call for GOP About a Wide-Awake Giant," which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on Monday, December 15, 1997, at page A3, quoted a former advisor to Governor Wilson as having summed it up this way, "We walked over the giant on our way to reelection in 1994, but in the process we woke it up."

of the 25,000 citizenship applications received by the Los Angeles district office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) each month are from Latinos.

This paper examines Latino participation in the politics of the state of California and, especially, of the county of Los Angeles during the 1990s. Through our research, we hope to gain an understanding of what percentage of the eligible Latino population registers to vote, how many registered Latinos go to the polls on election day, what factors might increase their participation in politics, and whether increased political participation will lead to greater political power for Latinos. We begin by examining the size and growth of the Latino population in California during the early 1990s using county-level data. Next, we use these population data to produce estimates of Latino and white voting-age populations, and from these estimates we calculate voter registration and turnout for these two populations in the elections from 1990 to 1996. Then, we focus our analysis on Los Angeles County and offer projections of Latino voter registration and turnout in that county from 1998 to 2020. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of our results and their implications for Latinos, politics, and California's future.

2. Population and Citizenship of Latinos in California

Because of the importance of population size and composition to short-term and long-term political power, in Figure 1, we compare the growth of the Latino population in California with that of other racial and ethnic groups.[4]

Figure 1 goes here

We see that, from 1990 to 1995, the growth of the Latino population in California dramatically outstripped that of all other racial or ethnic groups. The second fastest-growing group were Asians-Pacific Islanders; however, their growth was less than half that of Latinos. The growth in the black population was

[4] All of the population estimates are from the California Department of Finance, and they are reproduced as Table A1 in the appendix of this paper. These data and an explanation of how they are calculated are available at http://www.dof.ca.gov/html/Demograp/race-eth.htm. The Department of Finance used the 1990 Census data, as well as data collected annually at the county level, to produce estimates of the population of each racial and ethnic group in each year from 1990 to 1995.

only marginally greater than the growth of the white population. Extrapolation of these trends has many observers estimating that, by the year 2010, California's population will be more than 50 percent nonwhite, with the majority of these nonwhites being Latino (Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet, 1989), and that, by the year 2040, Latinos will constitute a majority of this state's population (*Los Angeles Times*, 1998d).

An important question relating to this dramatic increase in the Latino population in California during the first half of the 1990s concerns whether it is the result of immigration or resident population growth. Determining which of these sources is responsible for the increases is of long-term importance for understanding the California electorate. If many or most of the Latinos in California are immigrants who have not filed for citizenship, then the long-term prospects for an increase in the number of Latino voters may not be great.[5] On the other hand, if most of the increase in the Latino population of California is the result of the birth of Latino children in California, then these new Latinos are citizens, and the long-term prospects for an increase in the number of Latino voters is great indeed.

We answer this question in Figures 2 and 3. The first figure gives the net increase in the populations of various racial and ethnic groups from 1990 to 1995 as a result of emigration or immigration, while the second gives the net increase in the same populations of racial and ethnic groups as a result of new births. Beginning with Figure 2, we see that there was a negative net migration of whites from California during the first half of the 1990s, when almost 300,000 of them left the state. During this same period, there was a sizeable positive net migration of Latinos into California—almost 200,000. From 1990 to 1995, there was a net positive increase of almost 400,000 Asians and Pacific Islanders in California. Last, notice that there was a slight positive net migration into California by blacks.

Figures 2 and 3 go here

In Figure 3, we present the estimated net natural increases (that is, the number of births minus the number of deaths) for each racial and ethnic group during the first five years of the 1990s. There were net increases in the populations of each, with Latinos dramatically increasing their numbers by slightly more than 1.2 million. Although whites had a natural increase of just under 400,000, Asians and Pacific Islanders experienced an increase of slightly more than 200,000, and blacks had an increase of just under 200,000, none of these ethnic or racial groups had anywhere near the net natural increase seen for Latinos.

What do these population changes imply for the political participation of Latinos in contemporary California? Clearly, the population of Latinos is increasing

dramatically; and most of this increase can be attributed to births, not immigration. Simply, the net natural increase of Latinos is six times greater than their net migration. These population changes will affect the composition of the California electorate in two important ways. First, if these Latino children remain in California, then, beginning in 2015, the Latino voting-age population of that state should increase sharply. Second, these young children may cause their parents to become less transient and more actively involved in the political life of their communities, as predicted by Uhlaner et al. (1989): "If the Latino population ages and becomes more native-born and more English speaking, if the education and income levels rise, then we expect to see substantial increases in activity by Latinos" (p. 217). What remains to be seen, however, is whether or not Latino political activity has, in fact, increased during the early 1990s as a result of these population changes.

3. Registration and Turnout of Latinos, 1990–1996

Our goal is to produce estimates of Latino voter registration and turnout in California during the first half of this decade (1990–1996) to see if, as theorized, there has been an increase in this group's political participation. Overwhelmingly, previous research concerning registration and turnout has relied on data from large telephone surveys. The benefit of this data collection method is the ability to obtain detailed information about a respondent's socioeconomic characteristics and political opinions and involvement. The breadth of these data enables the researcher to test what factors are important in determining an individual's decision to register and to vote.

However, when used in this way, telephone surveys have two significant flaws. First, they overstate the proportions of voters who register and turn out. For example, in the widely cited and well-known recent work on political participation by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, entitled *Voice and Equality*, the authors find that 71 percent of their telephone survey sample reported voting in the 1988 U.S. presidential election.

[5] De la Garza (1996) reports that, traditionally, the immigrant Latino California population has been predominantly of Mexican origin, and this group has the second lowest naturalization rate among all immigrant groups (p. 13).

From the actual election results, we know that only about 50 percent of the national electorate turned out to vote in that election. This overreporting of turnout is endemic in studies that employ telephone surveys, and it dramatically influences our ability to determine accurately the levels of turnout and the reasons some eligible individuals did not vote (Teixeira, 1992).

Second, although the typical telephone survey attempts to be representative of the national American electorate, it does not adequately sample racial or ethnic groups, making it impossible to draw reliable inferences about their political behavior. To address this problem, some researchers have advocated the oversampling of minority groups (de la Garza et al., 1992; Uhlaner et al., 1989). However, intentional oversampling may bias the data if racial or ethnic group respondents are concentrated in a single neighborhood or geographic area and does not solve the participation overreporting problem.

Because of the flaws inherent in relying on telephone survey data, we offer a new approach. We use California county-level estimates of Latino and white voting-age populations, of registration, and of turnout to produce estimates of Latino and white voter registration and turnout for each county during the first four general elections of the 1990s (1990, 1992, 1994, and 1996), employing the method of generalized bounds (King, 1996). This method of producing estimates can best be illustrated by the following table.

Example for One California County in a Particular Election

	Registered Voters	Nonregistered Voters	VAP
Latinos	LR	LNR	L
Non-Latinos	NLR	NLNR	NL
Voter Registration	R	NR	1

We obtained the aggregate county-level proportions of the Latino and non-Latino populations as estimated by the California Department of Finance, and from these numbers we extrapolated the voting-age populations of Latinos and non-Latinos (L and NL, respectively) for each county. From the California Secretary of State's "Statement of the Vote," we obtained the aggregate proportions of total registered (R) and nonregistered (NR) voters in each county. Because the entries in this table are proportions, there are the following relationships among them. The rows can be summed horizontally (for example, LR + LNR = L). The columns can be summed vertically (for example, LR + NLR = R). The aggregate county-level data of the voting-age population (VAP) and the voter registration each sum to one (for example, R + NR = 1, and L + NL = 1).

We want to estimate the quantities in the interior cells of this table, that is, the proportions of registered and nonregistered Latino voters (LR and LNR, respectively) and the proportions of registered and nonregistered non-Latino voters (NLR and NLNR, respectively). However, because these numbers are proportions and we know the aggregate proportions (R and NR), we need estimate only two of them (LR and LNR) and can then determine the others by subtraction.

The newly developed method of generalized bounds enables us to produce these estimates accurately from the aggregated county-level data (the proportions of Latino and non-Latino voting-age populations and total registered and nonregistered voters) by relying on the fact that proportions must be between the values of zero and one and using repeated sampling combined with a maximization technique (King, 1997). [6] We repeat this process for each county and each election, for registration and turnout, and for both Latinos and whites to make our comparisons possible.

We begin by estimating the voting-age population (VAP) for Latinos and whites in each county in the general elections held in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 1996.[7] Using these

[6] This approach to making ecological inferences generalizes the models proposed in the literature over the past 25 years (Achen and Shively, 1995; Claggett and Van Wingen, 1993; Duncan and Davis, 1953; Dykstra, 1986; Flanigan and Zingale, 1985; Kousser, 1986; Shively, 1974, 1991; Sigelman, 1991) and avoids the many pitfalls of the previous approaches (King, 1997).

[7] As discussed earlier, we obtained the data about Latino and white voters from the California Department of Finance. These data provided estimates of Latino and white populations in each county, 1990–1995. We use the 1995 estimates in our analysis of the 1996 data. To eliminate individuals in each county who are not eligible to vote (noncitizens, those under 18, and the institutionalized population), we used the 1990

county-level VAP estimates, we then extrapolate the Latino and white voting-age populations for California and for its six different regions (Southern California, Bay Area, Central Coast, Central Valley, Mountains, and Northern California).[8] These estimates are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 goes here

In Table 1, when the statewide voting-age populations of Latinos and of whites are considered, we see that the proportion of Latinos who were eligible to vote in 1990 was 18 percent and had increased to almost 20 percent by 1996. During the same period, the statewide proportion of whites who were eligible to vote decreased from 72 percent to just under 70 percent. Thus, during this six-year period, the relative potential political power of Latinos was increasing.

In Table 1, when the six regional voting-age populations are considered, we see that in 1990, the voting-eligible populations of Latinos were concentrated in the Central Valley (28 percent), the Central Coast (28 percent), and Southern California (34 percent). In the other three regions, the Latino voting-age populations were much lower, ranging from 14 percent in the Bay Area to approximately 9 percent in both the Mountains and Northern California. In the same year, the population of voting-eligible whites was much less concentrated across the different regions of California. In Southern California, the Bay Area, the Central Coast, and the Central Valley, 54 to 66 percent of the voting-age population was white, and the proportion of voting-age whites was higher in the Mountains and in Northern California (approximately 85 percent).

Census estimates of the voting-age population in each county to obtain an estimate of the proportion of adults in each county who were eligible to register and vote.

[8] The regions are defined following the classification scheme used by Dan Walters in *The New California* (1992). Southern California consists of Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernadino, and San Diego Counties. Bay Area consists of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma Counties. Central Coast consists of Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and Ventura Counties. Central Valley consists of Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Yolo Counties. Mountains consists of Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra, Sutter, Tuolumne, and Yuba Counties. Northern consists of Del Norte, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity Counties.

By 1996, the proportion of the Latino voting-age population in the Central Valley, Central Coast, and Southern California was at least 30 percent. The other three regions (Northern California, Bay Area, and Mountains) witnessed increases in the voting-age population of Latinos, with the Bay Area experiencing the largest increase, to almost 16 percent.

Finally, in the last line of Table 1, when the Los Angeles County voting-age populations of Latinos and of whites are considered, we see that the proportion of voting-age Latinos was 38 percent in 1990 and increased to 42 percent in six years, giving this county the largest Latino voting-age population of any metropolitan county in California and the fastest growing Latino voting-age population in the state.[9] During the same period, the white voting-eligible population in Los Angeles County decreased from 41 percent to 35 percent.

Recognizing that registration is the first step toward participation in the political process, we use county-level estimates of voting-age population and of voter registration to extrapolate the registration rates for Latinos and for whites in California and present these estimates for the state, the six regions, and Los Angeles County in Table 2.[10]

Table 2 goes here

We estimate that 52 percent of the eligible Latino voters in California were registered in 1990. This rate of registration increased by 9 percent to 61 percent in 1992, remained virtually constant in 1994 (60 percent), but increased by an estimated 7 percent statewide in 1996. However, despite the magnitude of this increase (15 percent over four election years), notice that white voter registration in California increased from 79 percent to 86 percent between 1990 and 1996. The white voter registration estimates are important to note here for two reasons. When these voter registration estimates are compared, we see that the registration rate is 18 percent higher for whites than it is for

[9] Los Angeles County has the largest Latino VAP of any metropolitan county in California but ranks third behind two agricultural counties, Imperial in Southern California and San Benito in the Central Coast, for the largest Latino VAP (see Table A2).

Latinos but that the increases in Latino participation are more than twice those for whites. These results suggest that growth in the Latino population and the surfacing of several divisive issues may be resulting in increased Latino participation; however, whites are also participating at higher rates so that, in the short term, Latinos may not be experiencing a net gain in political power.

In Table 2, when the six regional voter registration estimates are considered, we find that, in 1990, at least one-half of Latino eligible voters were registered in all six regions of the state. Between 1990 and 1996, there were significant increases ranging from 12 to 19 percent in Latino voter registration in all six regions with the largest changes occurring in the Bay Area (17 percent) and the Central Coast (19 percent).

When white voter registration figures for the six regions are considered, we find that, in 1990, there is virtual equality across these geographic areas. Specifically, four regions have white voter registration of approximately 80 percent (Southern California, the Central Coast, Central Valley and the Mountains), Northern California has a slightly lower registration rate of 76 percent, and the Bay Area has a slightly higher registration rate of 82 percent. These six regions experienced different increases in white voter registration between 1990 and 1996, with the largest increase of 10 percent in the Central Coast. Northern California and the Mountains have increases of 7 percent, followed by Southern California and the Bay Area, which experience increases of approximately 6 percent. The Central Valley has the smallest increase (only 5 percent) during this period.

Finally, when voter registration in Los Angeles County in 1990 is considered, Latinos are registered at a rate significantly above the overall state registration rate for this group (60 percent compared with 52 percent). However, over the four national elections between 1990 and 1996, Latino voter registration in Los Angeles County increased by 8 percent, a rate which was less than that of Southern California (12 percent) and the rest of the state (15 percent). The voter registration rate for whites in Los Angeles County was 80 percent in 1990 and, by 1996, had increased to 86 percent. Thus, the increase in registration among Latinos in Los Angeles County was 2 percent greater than that for whites between 1990 and 1996.

[10] The county voter registration estimates are in the Appendix of this paper (Table A3).

Next, we consider what proportions of the Latinos and whites who are registered to vote actually turned out in the four general elections between 1990 and 1996.[11] In Table 3, we present a summary of our county-level turnout estimates for the entire state, the six different regions, and Los Angeles County.

Table 3 goes here

In 1990, Latino turnout in the state was low, with only 29 percent of the registered Latino voters going to the polls on election day. This turnout rate nearly doubled in 1992, to 57 percent. During the next three elections, the Latino turnout rate experienced minor fluctuations, decreasing to 43 percent in 1994 and increasing to 52 percent in 1996. For whites in California, a different pattern emerges. While 73 percent of registered white voters turned out in 1990, this turnout rate increased by 12 percent to 85 percent in 1992. Then, white voter turnout decreased to 81 percent in 1994 and decreased again to 76 percent in 1996. These figures highlight the fact that Latinos are politically disadvantaged; however, their disadvantage is decreasing. In 1990, the turnout rate among Latinos was 44 percent lower than that for white voters (29 percent compared with 73 percent), and by 1996, this disparity had been cut nearly in half (52 percent compared with 76 percent).

When the 1990 turnout rates for the six regions are considered, we see that Latino voter turnout was low, ranging from 23 percent to 34 percent in all six regions of California. Between 1990 and 1996, the Latino turnout rate increased substantially by at least 19 percent in every region. The largest increases occurred in Southern California, the Bay Area, and the Central Valley, where Latino voter turnout increased by approximately 25 percent. Because large increases occurred in the three regions (Central Valley, Central Coast, and Southern California) in which the Latino voting-age population is most concentrated (see Table 1), they may portend a strengthening of the Latino political voice.

In 1990, white voter turnout was also nearly the same in all six regions, ranging from 71 to 75 percent. In each region, white turnout rates increased by at least 10 percent

[11] We provide county voter turnout estimates in the Appendix of this paper (Table A4).

during the 1992 presidential election but returned to their previous level in 1994. However, in 1996, as in 1992, the white turnout rate increased again by at least 10 percent in each region. The overall changes in white turnout from 1990 to 1996 were positive in all six regions, ranging from 8 percent to 16 percent.

In Los Angeles County (see Table 3), the Latino turnout rate is estimated to be quite low in 1990 (29 percent). It more than doubles to 61 percent in 1992 but thereafter decreases to 44 percent in 1994. In 1996, the Latino turnout rate rebounds to 54 percent. However, when the off-year election turnout rates for Latinos in 1990 and 1994 are compared, there is a substantial increase (15 percent), which may be attributed to the presence of Proposition 187 on the 1994 ballot. White voters in Los Angeles County turned out at a rate of 75 percent in 1990 and 86 percent in 1992. The rate of white voter turnout fell to 75 percent in 1994 but increased to 79 percent in 1996. In summary, the turnout rates of whites and Latinos increased between 1990 and 1996, the white turnout rate increasing 4 percent and the Latino turnout rate increasing 15 percent (nearly four times the rate of increase for whites).

4. The Future of Latino Political Participation in Los Angeles County

Because of the size of Los Angeles County and its influence in California, now we consider the future political participation by the Latino population of this county and how this participation will alter the balance of political power within the state. To make these projections for the 1998 through 2020 elections, we utilize our estimates of the Latino voting-age population, registration, and turnout rates for Los Angeles County and the observed change in these rates. From 1990 to 1996, the average increase in the total voting-age population between elections was 88,832 potential voters, the average increase in the Latino voting-age population between elections was 108,572 potential voters, the average increase in the voter registration rate was 2.6 percent, and the average increase in the voter turnout rate was 5.1 percent. Using these increases, we produced projections of Latino political participation based on three different scenarios:

1. For each election, we increase the total and Latino voting-age populations at their average rates (88,832 and 108,572 potential voters, respectively) and hold Latino registration and turnout rates constant at their 1996 levels.

2. For each election, we increase the Latino voting-age population, registration, and turnout at their average rates (88,832 potential voters, 108,572 potential voters, 2.6 percent, and 5.1 percent, respectively).

3. For each election, we increase the Latino voting-age population, registration, and turnout at their average rates (88,832 potential voters, 108,572 potential voters, 2.6 percent, and 5.1 percent, respectively) until the year 2008 but then adjust the voting-age population to reflect the dramatic increase in young Latinos who will become eligible to vote in each of these elections (increases of 4.9 percent in 2008 and 2010, 5.9 percent in 2012 and 2014, 6.9 percent in 2016 and 2018, and 7.9 percent in 2020) while keeping the registration and turnout at their average rates.

We present these projections for Latino registration and turnout in all three scenarios in Figures 4 and 5.

Figures 4 and 5 go here

In Figure 4, we see that, under Scenario 1, Latino voter registration is projected to increase from the current rate of 29 percent to 38 percent of the total voting-age population in Los Angeles County by the year 2020. Thus, taking a conservative approach and using an average election increase in the voting-age population while holding registration and turnout rates constant yields a significant increase in the proportion of Latinos who register to vote.

Next, under Scenario 2, we see that if the Latino voting-age population and voter registration continue to increase at the rate at which they increased during the early 1990s, by the year 2006, Latino voter registration will be 39 percent of the total voting-age

population (approximately equal to the Scenario 1 estimate for the year 2020), and by the year 2020, Latino voter registration will be 56 percent of the total voting-age population (nearly double the current rate of 29 percent). Finally, under Scenario 3, which takes into account the dramatic increase in young Latinos who will become eligible to vote in each of the elections after 2008, we see that Latino registration increases significantly more than under Scenario 2 so that by 2020 Latino voter registration will be 66 percent of the total voting-age population.

Finally, we consider how many of these registered Latino voters will actually turn out to vote in future elections. In Figure 5, under Scenario 1, we project that Latino voter turnout will increase by one-third from the current rate of 15 percent to 20 percent of the total voting-age population in Los Angeles County by the year 2020, solely on the basis of the projected average increase in voting-age population. Under Scenarios 2 and 3, the Latino turnout rate increases dramatically from the current rate of 15 percent of the voting-age population in 1996 to 56 percent of the voting-age population in 2020 (Scenario 2) and to 66 percent of the voting-age population in 2020 (Scenario 3).

5. What Does It All Mean?

Our goal was to study Latino political participation in California and especially in Los Angeles County and to gain an understanding of what percentage of the eligible Latino population registers to vote, how many registered Latinos go to the polls on election day, what factors might increase their participation in politics, and whether increased political participation will lead to greater political power for Latinos.

Because of the importance of population size and composition to short-term and long-term political power, we began by examining the size and growth of the Latino population in California during the early 1990s. In the first half of this decade, the growth of the Latino population in this state dramatically outstripped that of any other racial or ethnic group. Most of this growth resulted not from immigration, as it had in the past, but from the births of more than 1.2 million new Californians. In fact, the net natural increase of Latinos was six times greater than their net migration; and within the next few decades, Latinos will constitute the largest single racial/ethnic group in the state.

These new California citizens may have an enormous impact on California politics in the twenty-first century if this young Latino population registers and turns out to vote.

Because population growth alone cannot guarantee increased political power, we examined the county-level voting-age population and registration and turnout rates for Latinos and compared them with those of whites. We found that, during the 1990s, there were increases in the Latino voting-age population and significant increases in voter registration and turnout rates, the latter largely in the wake of the 1994 election. These increases coincided with the rearrangement of the California public agenda to give more importance to the issues of immigration and affirmative action. Our results suggest that, while growth in the Latino population and the surfacing of several divisive issues may be increasing Latino participation, whites continue to participate at higher rates so that Latinos are not experiencing the net gain in political power their numbers would suggest.

Next, because of the size of Los Angeles County and its influence in California, we considered how current and future political participation by this population might alter the balance of power within the state. We observed that, between 1990 and 1996, the Latino voting-age population in Los Angeles County became the largest of any metropolitan county in California and the fastest growing in the state. During this same period, the county's white voting-eligible population decreased by 5 percent. This growth in the Latino voting-age population and its relative gain with respect to whites may signal a shift in political power in the county. At the same time, Latino registration in Los Angeles County increased by 8 percent and turnout increased by 25 percent, but both fell far short of white rates (68 percent versus 86 percent for registration and 54 percent versus 79 percent for turnout). This disparity in political participation between Latinos and whites suggests that Latinos have not realized their full political potential.

Our projections for Latino registration and turnout for the elections between 1998 and 2020 show that voter registration may increase from the current rate of 29 percent to more than 50 percent of the total voting-age population in Los Angeles County by the year 2020 and that Latino voter turnout may increase from the current rate of 15 percent to more than 65 percent of the voting-age population in this county by the year 2020. These results suggest that Latino political power should increase as this population grows

and matures, but the speed and magnitude of this increase will be dependent upon the group's registration and turnout rates.

As the Latino voting-age population continues to increase, our findings with regard to California and Los Angeles County indicate that it will be imperative to sustain and increase Latino voter registration and turnout rates so that the political potential of this group can become fully actualized. Unfortunately, the existing political participation literature and empirical findings suggest that Latino turnout will increase only as a larger portion of this population matures, acquires citizenship, becomes more educated, and attains a higher socioeconomic status (two examples are Verba et al., 1995; Uhlaner, 1996). Historically, high school dropout rates in Latino communities have averaged 30 percent, two and one-half times that of blacks and three and one-half times that of whites (*Orange County Register*, 1998b). Therefore, it is important that efforts be made to encourage higher levels of educational attainment among Latino youths and to decrease their high rates of school dropout by improving language and mentoring programs.

In response to this need, on February 2, 1998, President Bill Clinton proposed the Hispanic Education Action Plan as part of his budget. Under this plan, $618 million would be spent on reading, mathematics, and English language programs for disadvantaged Latino students. This proposal is especially important to California because, beginning with the 1996–97 school year, Latino students comprised a majority of the public school population in that state.

In the short term, Latinos are likely to find themselves underrepresented and their influence limited in the halls of California government. They may be able to increase their political clout by conducting targeted citizenship drives to increase the number of Latinos who are eligible to vote and by participating in labor organizing efforts to encourage Latino families to obtain citizenship, register, become politically active, and vote. As Latinos struggle to be heard in the corridors of power, they may find that it is politically advantageous for them to align themselves with larger, better-organized, and more-experienced advocacy groups.

But Latinos often exhibit a split political personality on issues, tending to be liberal on some and conservative on others. For example, Uhlaner (1996) finds Mexican Americans in California to be both liberal and conservative. They support increased welfare spending and oppose the death penalty. At the same time, they also support prayer in school and oppose abortion.

Three initiatives on the California ballot during the 1996 election serve to further illustrate this point. These measures are Proposition 209, which prohibited discrimination or preferential treatment by the state and other public entities, thus ending affirmative action; Proposition 211, which prohibited restrictions on attorney-client fee arrangements and also prohibited deceptive conduct by any person engaged in securities transactions

resulting in loss to pension and retirement funds; and Proposition 216, which imposed stiffer regulations on health care businesses. Conservatives supported Proposition 209 but opposed Propositions 211 and 216. Latino voters were opposed to all three, with 76 percent voting against Propositions 209 and 211, and 58 percent voting against Proposition 216.

In California, during the past two election cycles, Latinos have tended to support Democratic candidates over Republican candidates: 77 percent of Latinos voted for Feinstein in the 1994 Senate race; 71 percent of Latinos voted for Brown in the 1994 Gubernatorial election; and 75 percent of Latinos supported Clinton's reelection bid in 1996.[12] But, while Latino voters have exhibited a political party preference, it is not clear that they have developed a party loyalty. In the near term, Latinos may derive greatest benefit from joining coalitions to gain passage of specific legislation, rather than from aligning themselves permanently with either major political party.

[12] The 1994 estimates come from the *Voter News Service* California Exit Poll, November 1994. The 1996 estimates are from the *Los Angeles Times Poll*, Study 389, Exit Poll of the November 5, 1996 General Election.