

Findings in Brief

- A comparison of the racial and ethnic composition of the California electorate in 1990 and 2000 shows that most of the 1.1 million increase in the state's registered voters over this period was the result of a huge growth in the state's Latino voters. Currently, 16% of the state's registered voters are Latinos, up from 10% in 1990, translating to a net increase of about 1 million Latino voters over the past decade. By contrast, there has been a net decline of about 100,000 white non-Hispanic voters in California since 1990. White non-Hispanics now comprise 72% of the state's registered voters, down from 79% in 1990.
- According to a recently completed large-scale Field Institute survey of California Latinos, a majority of the state's Latino adults (61%) are not registered to vote. The main impediment to Latino voting registration is citizenship, with roughly two-thirds of those not registered reporting that they are not U.S. citizens. When the 39% of Latinos currently on the voter rolls are asked when they first became registered, nearly half did so since 1994. That was the year in which California voters passed Proposition 187, the Illegal Immigration Act, which aroused strong passions within the Latino community. Its passage appears to have motivated a large number of unregistered Latinos to go on the voter rolls.
- Latinos who've registered to vote since 1994 have a very different demographic profile than their predecessors. Recent Latino registrants are much younger, include large proportions of foreign-born residents, are more apt to live in Los Angeles County, and are more likely to have lower levels of education and income than Latinos who registered prior to 1994. These characteristics are more reflective of the larger non-voting Latino population in California and represent a significant broadening of the state's voter pool.
- Democrats currently outnumber Republicans among Latino voters in the state nearly three to one. According to recent Field Institute surveys, 60% of registered Latinos are Democrats, 22% are Republicans and 18% are non-partisans or registered with another party. This is in contrast to the party alignment of other California voters, of whom 42% are Democrats, 39% are Republicans and 19% are non-partisans or registrants of another party. Fewer recently registered Latino voters than long-time Latino registrants are Republicans (18% vs. 24%), while a larger proportion are non-partisans or minor party registrants (23% vs. 15%).
- While the partisan orientation of California Latinos is much more Democratic than Republican, the political ideology of Latino voters is similar to that of other California voters. About half of California Latino voters (47%) consider themselves middle-of-the-road in politics, while 31% are conservative and 22% are liberal. A larger proportion of long-time Latino voters are conservative (34%) than recent Latino registrants (27%), while recent Latino registrants are slightly more likely than long-time Latino voters to be liberals (25% vs. 20%).
- According to a Voter News Service (VNS) exit poll of California voters in the March 7 open primary election, Latino voters comprised 13% of the electorate, and they favored Gore over Bush by a 41-point margin (58% to 17%). This advantage among Latino voters accounted for virtually all of Gore's 6 point overall victory margin over Bush in the primary election. Voters other than Latinos divided their votes evenly between Gore and Bush (30% to 29%) in the primary.
- When Latinos who participated in the March 7, 2000 California primary were asked by VNS who they would prefer in a general election pitting Gore against Bush, these same voters favored Gore by a 41-point margin, 68% to 27%.
- Democratic candidates have long held an edge over Republicans among Latino voters in top-of-the-ticket statewide elections in California. However, this advantage has grown considerably since 1994. Whereas Latino voters favored Democrats over GOP candidates for governor by 6 percentage points in both the 1986 and 1990 elections, this advantage has grown dramatically in recent elections – to 46 points in 1994 and to a record high 61 points in 1998. At the same time, Latinos have become a larger part of the California electorate, increasing from 5% of voters in 1990 to 14% in 1998.
- These two factors – Latino voters' greater preference for Democratic candidates and their larger share of the overall electorate – have combined in recent election cycles to produce a structural advantage for Democratic candidates in top-of-the-ticket election contests. Latino voters contributed less than 1 percentage point to the size of the Democratic candidate's statewide lead over GOP candidates in the 1984 presidential election and in both the 1986 and 1990 gubernatorial elections. Since then the Democratic advantage derived from Latino voters has grown considerably. In 1994, Latino voters contributed 4.1 percentage points statewide to the Democratic gubernatorial candidate. This grew to 5.4 percentage points in the 1996 presidential election, and to 8.5 percentage points in the last gubernatorial election in 1998.

Most of state's increase in registered voters since 1990 is due to the growth of Latino voters

According to the California Secretary of State, California has witnessed a net increase of slightly more than 1.1 million voters over the past ten years. At present, there are about 14.6 million voters on the official rolls, up from about 13.5 million in 1990. According to estimates from statewide surveys of voters conducted by The Field Institute this increase has been accompanied by a significant change in the racial and ethnic composition of the state's voters.

Current surveys indicate that 72% of the state's registered voters are white non-Hispanic, down from 79% in 1990. This translates to a net decline in the actual number of about 100,000 white non-Hispanic voters in California over this period. Conversely, both the number and percentage of Latino voters has been on the rise. Currently, 16% of the state's registered voters are Latinos, up from 10% in 1990, and translates to a net increase of about 1 million Latino voters in California over the past decade.

There has been relatively little change in the proportion or number of black/African-American voters in California since 1990. Current survey estimates place the proportion of black/African-American voters at 6% of the electorate, or 900,000 voters, similar to 7% and about 950,000 voters observed in 1990.

Asian voters, along with the relatively small proportion of voters from other racial and ethnic minorities, have increased their share of the state's registered voter population from 4% in 1990 to 6% at present, a net increase of about 300,000 voters over the past ten years.

	1990		2000		Δ
	(in 000s)	%	(in 000s)	%	
Registered voters (Total)	13,478	(100%)	14,632	(100%)	+ 1,154,000
White (non-Hisp.)	10,600	(79%)	10,500	(72%)	- 100,000
Latino	1,350	(10%)	2,350	(16%)	+ 1,000,000
Black	950	(7%)	900	(6%)	- 50,000
Asian/other	600	(4%)	900	(6%)	+ 300,000

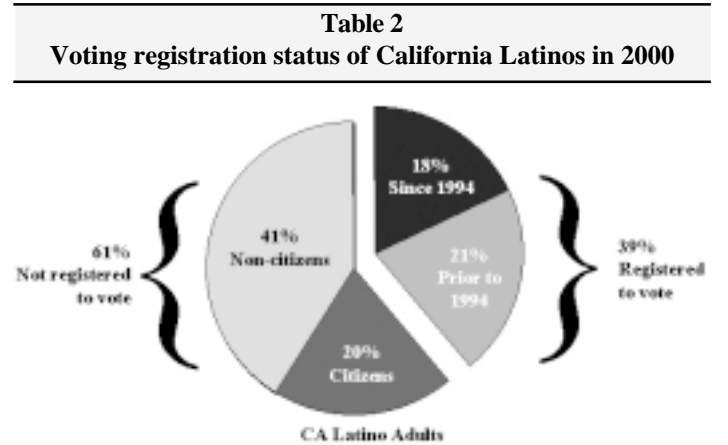
Source: Registered voter totals from the California Secretary of State. Racial/ethnic subtotals are estimates based on annual averages from statewide surveys of registered voters in California by The Field Institute.

While most Latino adults are not registered to vote, nearly half of those who are have registered since 1994

The Field Institute recently completed a statewide survey of 1,033 Latino adults as part of a larger study on health issues for the California HealthCare Foundation. Because the study included a large number of Latino adults and because all sampling was conducted through an intensive screening effort identifying Latino households from a purely random digit dial sample frame, the study provides a highly accurate and timely exploration of the state's adult Latino population.

According to the study, a majority of Latino adults (61%) reports not being registered to vote. The main impediment to Latino voting registration is clearly citizenship, with roughly two-thirds of those not registered (or 41% of all Latino adults) reporting that they are not U.S. citizens.

When the 39% of California Latino adults currently on the voter rolls are asked when they first became registered voters, slightly less than half (or 18% of all Latino adults) did so since 1994. That was the year in which California voters passed Proposition 187, the Illegal Immigration Act, which aroused strong passions within the Latino community. Its passage appears to have motivated a large number of previously unregistered Latinos to become registered voters.



Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California conducted January 7-23, 2000 in English and Spanish.

Latinos who've registered to vote since 1994 have a very different demographic profile than their predecessors

A. Recent Latino registrants are younger

Table 3 compares the age distributions of Latinos who've registered to vote since 1994 to those on the rolls prior to 1994. It also reports the age distributions of the overall Latino adults population, Latino citizens who are not registered to vote, and non-citizen Latinos.

This comparison shows that Latinos who have recently become registered voters are considerably younger as a group than Latinos voters registered prior to 1994. Half (50%) of recent registrants are under age 30, another 22% are

age 30-39, while just 28% are age 40 or older. This compares to a much older age profile of Latinos on the voter rolls prior to 1994, over two-thirds of whom (65%) are age 40 or older.

The overall profile of California Latinos voters now subdivides into nearly equal-sized quartiles, with a quarter of voters under age 30, a quarter age 30-39, a quarter age 40-49 and a quarter age 50 or older. While this profile is somewhat older than the overall Latino adult population, the recent surge in Latino registration since 1994 is making the Latino voting population somewhat more reflective of the overall Latino adult population in California.

Table 3
Comparing California's Latino voters and non-voters, by age

	Total CA Latino adults	Registered Latinos			Citizens not. reg. to vote	Non-citizens
		Total	Prior to 1994	Since 1994		
18 – 29	36%	28%	9%	50%	46%	39%
30 – 39	31	24	26	22	35	37
40 – 49	18	24	31	16	11	14
50 or older	15	24	34	12	8	10
(n)	(1,033)	(459)	(250)	(209)	(198)	(370)

Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California, January 7-23, 2000, conducted in English and Spanish.

B. Many recent Latino registrants are foreign-born

Nearly half of California Latinos who've registered to vote since 1994 (44%) are immigrants born outside the United States. This compares to just 12% of foreign-born voters among Latinos who were registered to vote in California prior to 1994.

The greater foreign-born influence of recent Latino registrants is more reflective of the total adult population of Latinos in California, 59% of whom were born outside the U.S.

Table 4
Comparing California's Latino voters and non-voters, by nativity

	Total CA Latino adults	Registered Latinos			Citizens not. reg. to vote	Non-citizens
		Total	Prior to 1994	Since 1994		
Born outside U.S.	59%	27%	12%	44%	36%	100%
Born in U.S./ outside CA	10	17	26	7	20	–
Born in CA	31	56	62	49	44	–
(n)	(1,033)	(459)	(250)	(209)	(198)	(370)

Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California, January 7-23, 2000, conducted in English and Spanish.

C. Recent Latino registrants more likely to reside in Los Angeles County

Greater than four in ten (42%) of the Latinos who've come onto the state's voter rolls since 1994 are residents of Los Angeles County. This compares to a smaller 28% proportion of Los Angeles County residents among long-time Latino voters.

On the other hand, a larger proportion of long-time Latino voters (41%) than recent registrants (26%) reside either in the Central Valley or San Francisco Bay Area.

The geographic distribution of recent Latino registrants is more reflective of the overall adult Latino population in California, 41% of whom reside in Los Angeles County.

Table 5
Comparing California's Latino voters and non-voters, by region of residence

	Total CA Latino adults	Registered Latinos			Citizens not. reg. to vote	Non-citizens
		Total	Prior to 1994	Since 1994		
L.A. County	41%	34%	28%	42%	41%	49%
Other Southern CA	30	30	29	30	29	30
Central Valley	16	19	22	15	16	12
S.F. Bay Area	11	15	19	11	11	7
Other Northern CA	2	2	2	2	3	2
(n)	(1,033)	(459)	(250)	(209)	(198)	(370)

Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California, January 7-23, 2000, conducted in English and Spanish.

D. Recent Latino registrants have fewer years of formal education

Recent Latino registrants, as a group, have fewer years of formal schooling than Latinos who were registered to vote prior to 1994. Over one in three of recent Latino registrants (38%) have less than a high school education, 24% are high school graduates, while 38% have attended college or trade school. By contrast, long-time Latino registrants tend to have higher levels of education, with 61% having attended college or trade school.

The generally lower level of educational attainment among recent Latino registrants is also much more reflective of the overall adult Latino population, 44% of whom are not high school graduates.

Table 6
Comparing California's Latino voters and non-voters,
by education

	Total CA Latino adults	Registered Latinos			Citizens not. reg. to vote	Non-citizens
		Total	Prior to 1994	Since 1994		
8 th grade or less	24%	10%	4%	17%	12%	42%
Some high school	20	14	8	21	26	23
High school graduate	25	26	27	24	30	22
Some college/trade school	22	33	36	30	25	10
College graduate	9	17	25	8	7	3
(n)	(1,033)	(459)	(250)	(209)	(198)	(370)

Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California, January 7-23, 2000, conducted in English and Spanish.

E. Recent Latino registrants have lower household income levels

The annual household incomes reported by recent Latino registrants is significantly less than that of long-time Latino voters. About a third of recent registrants (34%) have household incomes of less than \$20,000 per year, another third (31%) have annual incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000, while 27% have income levels of \$40,000 or more. Among long-time Latino voters, by contrast, a majority (53%) reports having an annual household income of \$40,000 or more.

The income levels of recently registered Latinos more closely approximates that of all California Latinos than was true of Latino voters registered prior to 1994.

Table 7
Comparing California's Latino voters and non-voters,
by household income

	Total CA Latino adults	Registered Latinos			Citizens not. reg. to vote	Non-citizens
		Total	Prior to 1994	Since 1994		
Less than \$10,000	15%	8%	2%	14%	14%	21%
\$10,000 – \$19,999	25	14	9	20	18	38
\$20,000 – \$39,999	27	32	32	31	27	23
\$40,000+	23	40	53	27	22	8
Not reported	10	6	4	8	19	10
(n)	(1,033)	(459)	(250)	(209)	(198)	(370)

Source: Field Institute survey of 1,033 Latino adults in California, January 7-23, 2000, conducted in English and Spanish.

Democrats outnumber Republicans among Latino voters nearly three to one

According to the most recent statewide surveys of The Field Institute, Democrats outnumber Republicans among California Latinos nearly three to one. Six in ten Latino voters (60%) in the state are Democrats, 22% are Republicans and 18% are non-partisans or registered with another party. This is in contrast to the party alignment of all other voters in the state, of whom 42% are registered as Democrats, 39% are registered as Republicans and 19% are non-partisans or registrants of another party.

Similar proportions of Latinos who registered to vote prior to 1994 (61%) are registered as Democrats as those registered since 1994 (59%). However, fewer of the recently registered Latinos than long-time registrants are Republicans (18% vs. 24%), while a larger proportion are non-partisans or minor party registrants (23% vs. 15%).

Table 8
Party registration of Latino voters
compared to other voters in California

	Registered Latinos			All other voters ¹
	Total ²	Prior to 1994 ²	Since 1994 ²	
Democrat	60%	61%	59%	42%
Republican	22	24	18	39
Non-partisan/ other party	18	15	23	19
(n)	(830)	(448)	(382)	(4,592)

Sources: (1) Average of 1999-2000 surveys from Field Institute surveys of California voters who are non-Hispanic.

(2) Combined estimates from Field Institute surveys of California Latino voters conducted in January and February 2000.

Political ideology of California Latinos similar to the state's overall electorate

While the partisan orientation of California Latinos is much more Democratic leaning than the rest of the state's electorate, their political ideology is generally similar. About half of California Latino voters (47%) consider themselves middle-of-the-road in politics, while 31% are conservative and 22% are liberal. This is quite similar to the political ideology of all other voters, of whom 33% are conservatives, 45% are middle-of-the-road in politics and 22% are liberals.

Some significant differences in the political ideologies are observed between recent Latino registrants and Latinos who first registered prior to 1994. While about half of both groups describe themselves as middle-of-the-road in politics, a larger proportion of long-time Latino voters is conservative (34%) than recent registrants (27%), while recent registrants are slightly more likely than long-time voters to be liberals (25% vs. 20%).

Table 9
Political ideology of California Latinos compared to other voters in California

	Registered Latinos			All other voters ¹
	Total ²	Prior to 1994 ²	Since 1994 ²	
Conservative	31%	34%	27%	33%
Middle-of-the-road	47	46	48	45
Liberal	22	20	25	22
(n)	(830)	(448)	(382)	(4,592)

Sources: (1) Average of 1999-2000 surveys from Field Institute surveys of California voters.

(2) Combined estimates from Field Institute surveys of California Latino voters conducted in January and February 2000.

Latinos provided Gore with virtually all of his 6-point victory margin over Bush in CA's open primary

According to the official Statement of Vote from the March 7, 2000 primary election in California, Democrat Al Gore received 34.3% of all votes cast in the open primary for president, Republican George W. Bush received 28.5% of the votes, Republican John McCain was the choice of 23.4%, 8.5% of voters supported Democrat Bill Bradley, while 5.3% chose other candidates.

According to the Voter News Service (VNS) exit poll of California voters in that election, Latino voters comprised 13% of the electorate and they favored Gore over Bush more than three to one, 58% to 17%. This 41-point plurality among Latinos provided Gore with virtually his entire 6 point victory margin over Bush among the overall electorate in the primary. All other (non-Hispanic) voters were evenly divided in their preferences between Gore and Bush, with 30% favoring Gore and 29% supporting Bush.

An analysis of the results from a pre-election poll of The Field Institute completed during the final week of the primary shows that recent Latino registrants were far more supportive of Gore than long-time Latino voters. Those Latinos who registered to vote since 1994 favored Gore over Bush by a 60% to 22% margin. Latinos who were registered prior to 1994 also supported Gore over Bush, but by a narrow 39% to 17% margin. Twice as many long-time Latino voters (24%) than recent Latino registrants (11%) supported McCain.

Table 10
Voting preferences in California's March 7 open primary election vote for President

	Total primary election voters ¹	Registered Latinos			All other voters ²
		Total ²	Prior to 1994 ³	Since 1994 ³	
Al Gore (D)	34.3%	58%	39%	60%	30%
George W. Bush (R)	28.5	17	17	22	29
John McCain (R)	23.4	14	24	11	25
Bill Bradley (D)	8.5	8	10	6	9
Other candidates	5.3	4	10	1	7
(n)		(654)	(148)	(92)	(3,549)

Sources: (1) Official results from the Statement of the Vote, California Secretary of State in the March 7, 2000 primary election.

(2) Voter News Service exit poll of California voters in the March open primary election.

(3) Final pre-election Field Institute survey of likely Latino voters in California's March 7 open primary election conducted February 22-March 3, 2000 (excluding undecided voters).

Latinos voting in the primary election prefer Gore over Bush in the general election by a 68% to 27% margin

The VNS exit poll in California also asked primary election voters whether they would favor Gore or Bush in the upcoming general election. The results show Gore leading Bush by 12 percentage points in California among the overall primary electorate, 53% to 41%. However, Gore was favored over Bush by a 41 percentage point margin – 68% to 27% – among Latino voters. Among all other California voters in the primary Gore was favored over Bush by 8 points – 50% to 42%.

Table 11
Voting preferences of the primary electorate pairing Gore against Bush in a November general election

	Total primary election voters	Latino voters	All other voters
Gore	53%	68%	50%
Bush	41	27	42
Undecided	6	5	8
(n)	(2,252)	(344)	(1,908)

Source: Voter News Service exit poll of California voters in the March 7 2000 open primary election.

California Latinos have been giving Democratic candidates a growing edge in recent top-of-the-ticket statewide elections

Democratic candidates have long held an edge over Republicans among Latino voters in top-of-the-ticket statewide elections. However, this advantage has grown considerably since 1994. For example, whereas Latino voters favored Democrats over GOP candidates for governor by 6 percentage points in both the 1986 and 1990 elections, this advantage has grown dramatically in recent elections – to 46 points in 1994 and to 61 points in 1998. At the same time, Latinos have become a larger part of the California electorate, increasing from 5% of voters in 1990 to 14% in 1998.

These two factors – Latino voters’ greater preference for Democratic candidates and their larger share of the overall electorate — have combined in recent election cycles to produce a structural advantage for Democratic candidates in top-of-the-ticket election contests. Latino voters contributed less than 1 percentage point to the size of the Democratic candidate’s statewide lead over GOP candidates in the 1984 presidential election and in both the 1986 and 1990 gubernatorial elections. Since then the Democratic advantage derived from Latino voters has grown considerably. In 1994 Latino voters contributed 4.1 percentage points statewide to the Democratic gubernatorial candidate. This grew to 5.4 percentage points in the 1996 presidential election, and to 8.5 percentage points in the last gubernatorial election in 1998.

Table 12
Trend of Latino voting in statewide top-of-the-ticket elections in California (1984 – 1998)

Election	Latino votes cast for...		Dem. plurality among Latinos	Latino vote as % of overall vote	Net edge Latinos gave Dems in overall vote
	Dem. candidate	GOP candidate			
1998 (Governor)	78%	17	+61	14%	+8.5
1996 (President)	70%	21	+49	11%	+5.4
1994 (Governor)	71%	25	+46	9%	+4.1
1992 (President)	65%	35*	+30	8%	+2.4
1990 (Governor)	53%	47	+6	5%	+0.3
1988 (President)	65%	34	+31	7%	+0.4
1986 (Governor)	52%	46	+6	7%	+0.4
1984 (President)	55%	44	+11	8%	+0.9

Source: Exit polls conducted in California by Voter News Service, its predecessor Voter Research and Surveys, or exit polls sponsored by CBS, NBC, ABC or The Field Institute in each election cycle

* includes votes cast for Ross Perot

About The Field Institute

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