



CLACLS

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Latino Voter Registration and Participation Rates in the 2020 Presidential Election

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LATINO DATA PROJECT

The Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies is a research institute that works for the advancement of the study of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latinos in the United States in the doctoral programs at the CUNY Graduate Center. One of its major priorities is to provide funding and research opportunities to Latino students at the Ph.D. level.

The Center established and helps administer an interdisciplinary specialization in Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies in the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies program.

The Latino Data Project was developed with the goal of making information available on the dynamically growing Latino population of the United States and especially New York City through the analysis of extant data available from a variety of sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the National Institute for Health, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and state and local-level data sources.

All Latino Data Project reports are available at <http://clacls.gc.cuny.edu>

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Executive Summary¹

- Latino voter registration rates reached an all-time high in the 2020 presidential election: 61.1% of all Latino citizens 18 years of age and older, rising from 57.3% in 2016.
- Latino voting rates (the percentage of Latinos eligible to vote who actually voted) also rose to a historic high of 53.7% in November 2020, increasing from 47.3% in 2016.
- The number of Latino votes in the 2020 election, approximately 16.5 million, was an extraordinary increase of 29.8% from the 12.7 million votes cast in 2016.
- Latino voters accounted for 10.2% of all votes cast in the 2020 presidential election, an increase from 9.2% in 2016.
- Nearly 60% of all eligible Latino voters were between 18 and 44 years of age.
- Voting rates rose significantly among 18-24-year-old Latinos, from 38.4% of Latino eligible voters in 2016 to 44.1% in 2020.
- Voting rates increased dramatically among 25-44-year-old Latinos, from 47.4% of Latino eligible voters in 2016 to 56.6% in 2020.
- Latinos born in the U.S. accounted for 74.4% of all Latino votes cast in 2020; naturalized Latino citizens for 25.6% of total Latino votes.
- Among U.S.-born Latinos there was a significant increase in voting rates, from 45.5% of Latino eligible voters in 2016 to 53.5% in 2020. Among naturalized Latinos eligible to vote, 54.5% voted in 2020.
- The overall increase in Latino registration and voting rates was closely tied to the rise in rates among younger Latino voters, and among Latino voters born in the U.S.

¹ All data on registration and voting found in this report were derived from the Voting and Registration Tables issued by the U.S. Census Bureau at <https://www.census.gov/topics/public-sector/voting/data/tables.html>.

The electorate is defined as all citizens 18 years of age and older; registration rates and voting rates are percentages of the Latino electorate, and NOT of the total Latino population 18 years of age and older.

- It should also be noted that among 18-24-year-olds, Latinas voted at a 44.1% rate compared with Latinos at 38.4% in 2020; among 25-44 year-olds, women voted at 56.6% compared with 47.4% of men; and in the 45-64-year-old age category, Latinas voted at 61.7% compared with 58.7% of Latinos.
- Although these participation rates were clearly a dramatic improvement from 2016, Latino voting rates continued to lag behind those of non-Hispanic whites (70.9%); African Americans (62.6%); and Asians (59.7%).
- In two states with large Latino populations with historically low voter participation rates, there was an extraordinary increase in Latino voters in 2020.
 - In Arizona, the absolute number of Latino voters soared by 49.9% between 2016 and 2020, from 543,000 to 814,000 votes; and the Latino voting rate rose from 47.4% to 60.8%.
 - In Texas, from 2016 to 2020 Latino votes increased from 1,938,000 to 2,972,000, a rise of 53.4%. The Latino voting rate in the state soared from 40.5% of eligible Latino voters in 2016 to 53.1% in 2020.
- In key states which Democrats won by slim majorities, there were important surges in Latino voting even though Latino populations were relatively small.
 - In Pennsylvania, between 2016 and 2020 the number of votes rose by nearly 18%, from 229,000 to 270,000 while the voting rate went from 51.7% to 54.3%.
 - In Michigan, only 36% of eligible Latinos voted in 2016; 54.7% in 2020. Actual votes rose from 74,000 to 165,000.
 - In Georgia, there was an increase in actual Latino votes by 10.6% -- from 161,000 in 2016 to 178,000 in 2020, even though voting rates among Latinos fell over the same period from 47.9% to 44.2%.

Registration and Participation Rates

Latino voter registration and participation rates in the November 2020 election reached historic highs and shattered the virtual stagnation which had been extant since the 1992 presidential election and before.

Participation rates, the percentage of eligible voters who actually cast ballots, had never surpassed 50% prior to 2020, when 53.7% of eligible Latino voters nationally went to the polls. (See figure 1).

Registration rates, the voter registration of citizens 18 years of age and older, had hovered in the 57% to 58% level prior to 2020, with a peak at 59.4% in 2008, the first year of the Obama candidacy. In 2020, 61.1% of all eligible Latinos were registered to vote. (See figure 2).

Additionally, nearly 88% of registered Latino voters voted in 2020, up from 83.1% in 2016 and a historic high. (See figure 3).

Figure 1
 Latino Total Voters as a Percentage of all Eligible Latino Voters (the Electorate)
 Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020

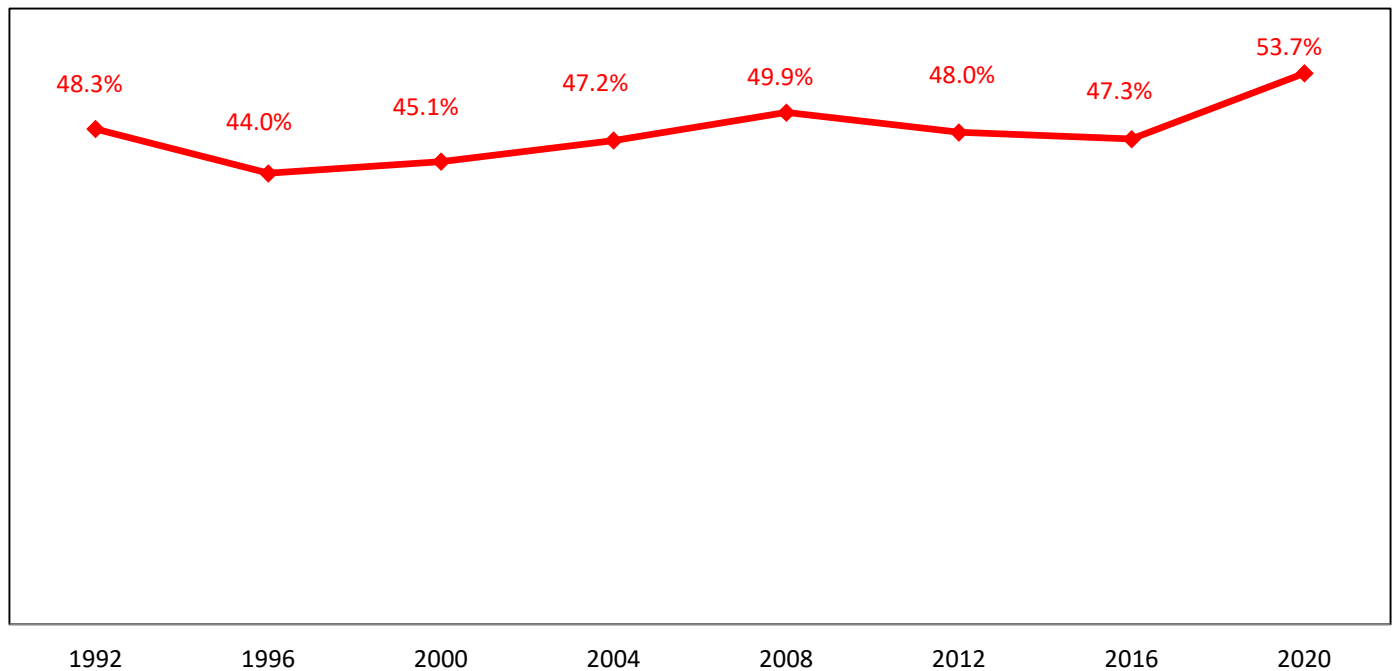


Figure 2
 Latino Registered Voters as a Percentage of all Eligible Latino Voters (the Electorate)
 Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020

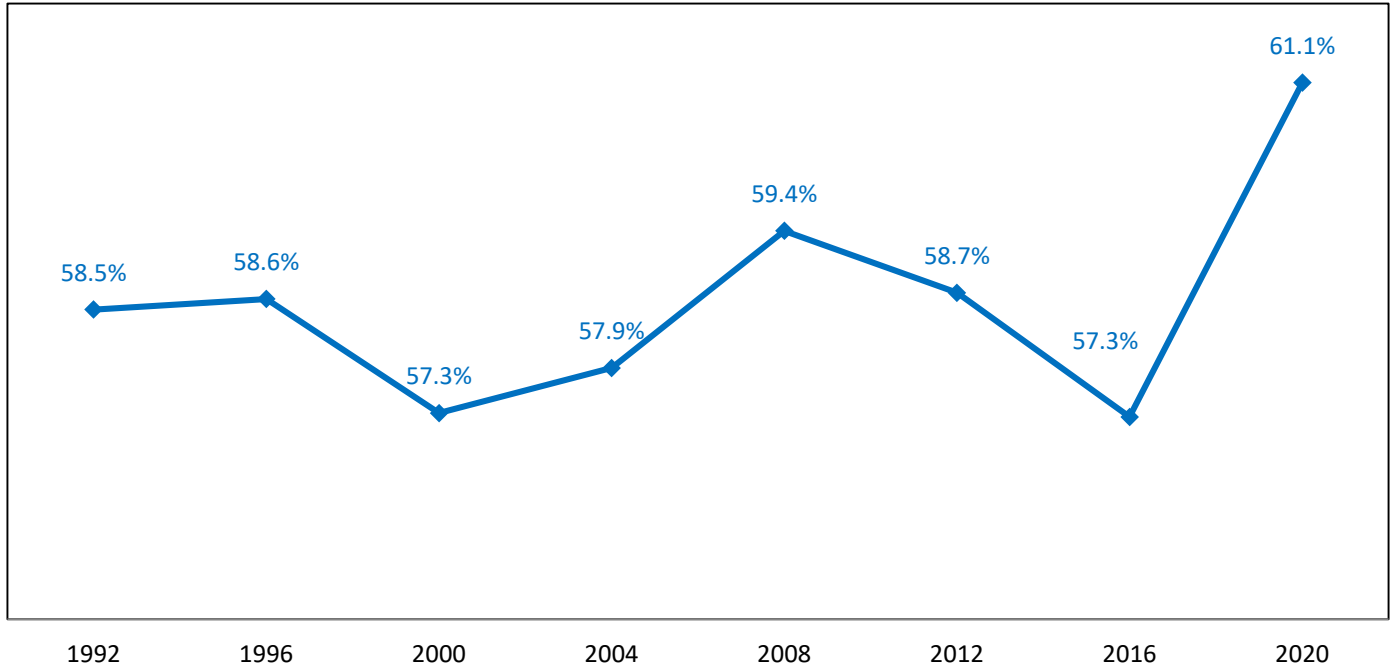
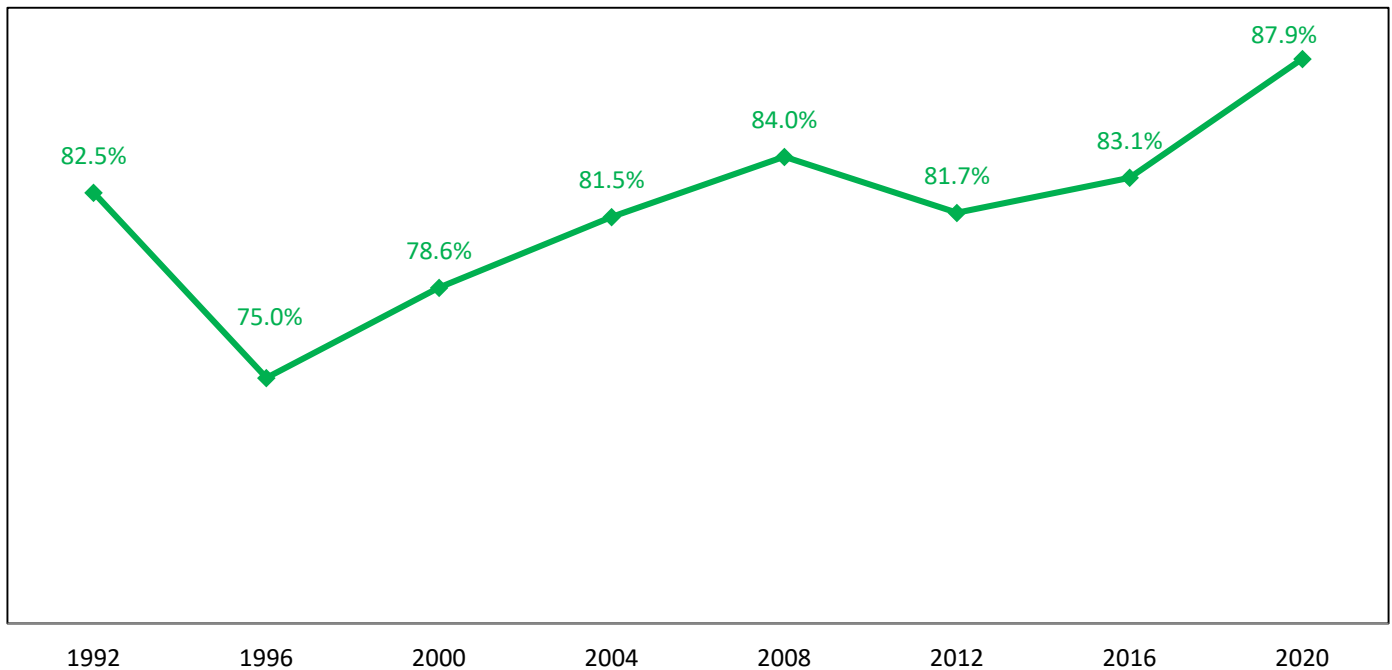


Figure 3
 Latino Voters as a Percentage of all Registered Latino Voters (the Electorate)
 Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020



Number of Votes

In numerical terms, the Latino electorate has increased meteorically--to over 30.6 million eligible voters in 2020--and there are as many potential Latino voters as there are African-American voters (30.2 million in 2020).

This has resulted in more Latinos registered to vote than ever before, at over 18.7 million; and more actual votes cast by Latinos, at over 16.4 million votes. (See figure 4).

In fact, the number of Latino registered voters rose by 22.6% from 2016, and the number of Latino votes cast increased an astounding 29.8% between 2016 and 2020. (See figure 5).

Figure 4
The Latino Electorate, Registered Voters, and Voters
Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020

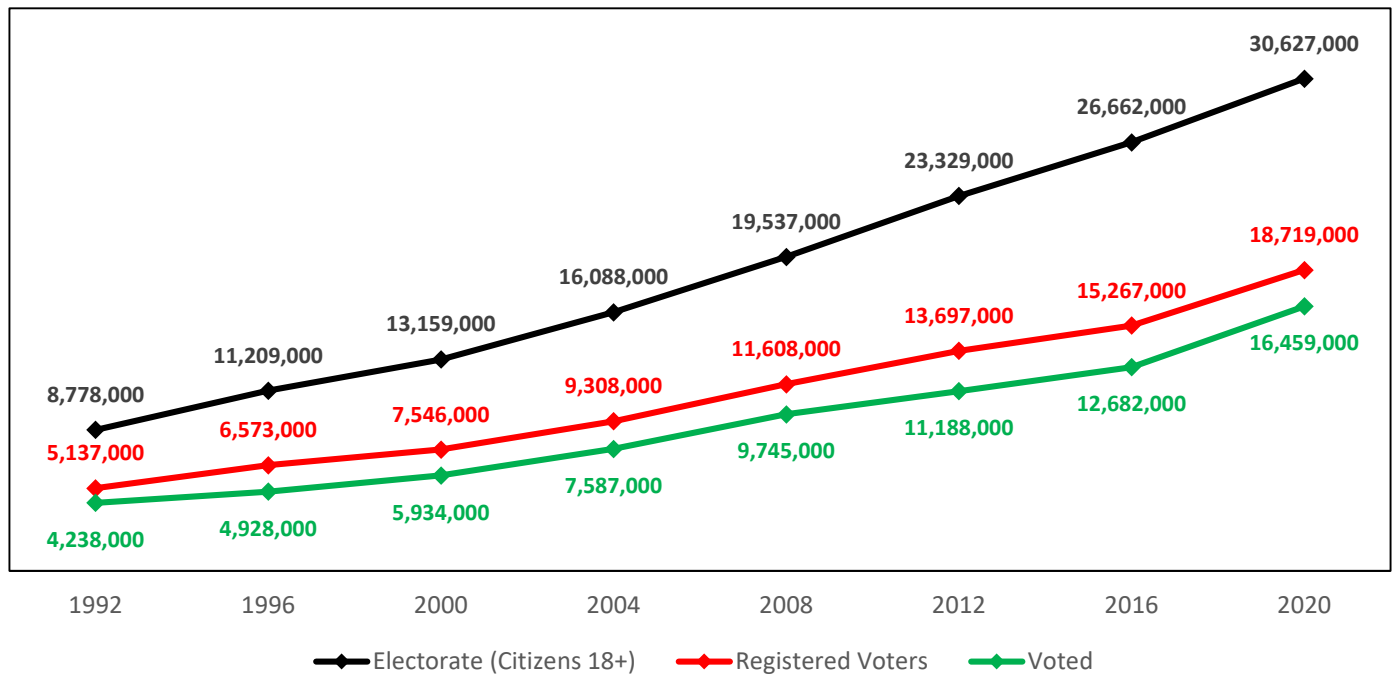
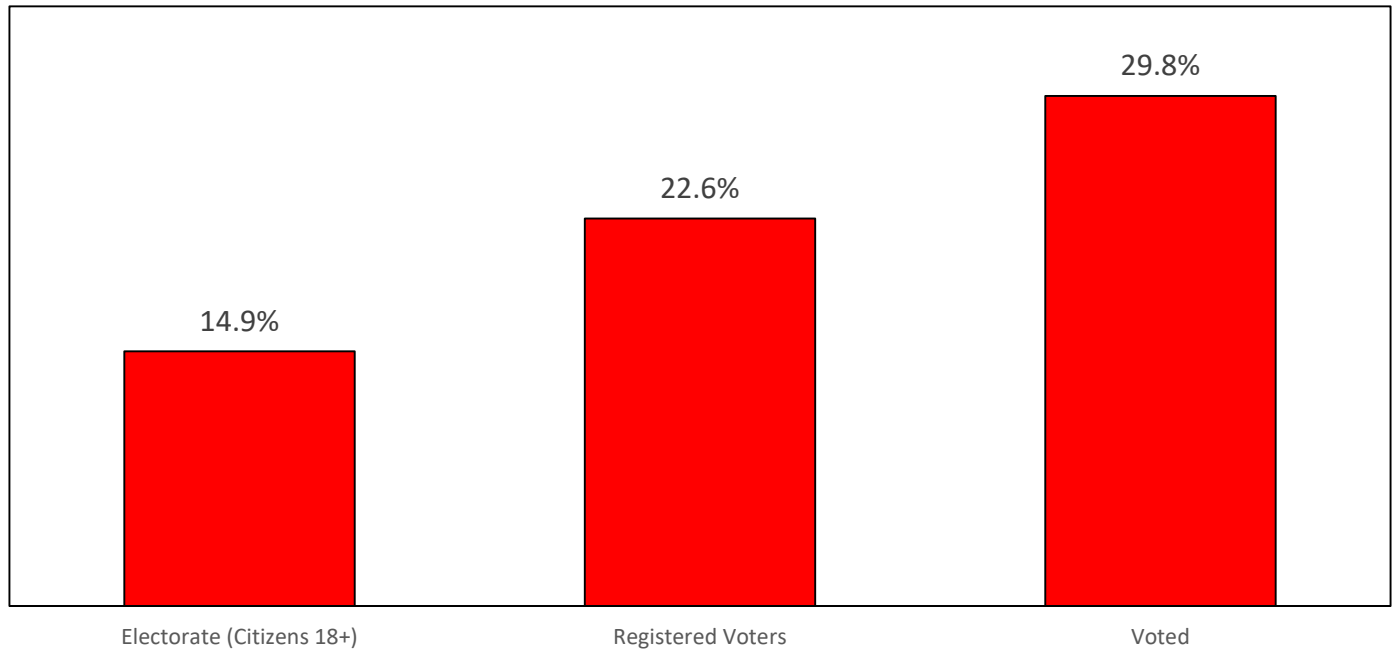


Figure 5
Percentage Increase in Latino Electorate, Registered Voters, and Voted, 2016 - 2020



Percentages of Total Registered and Actual Voters

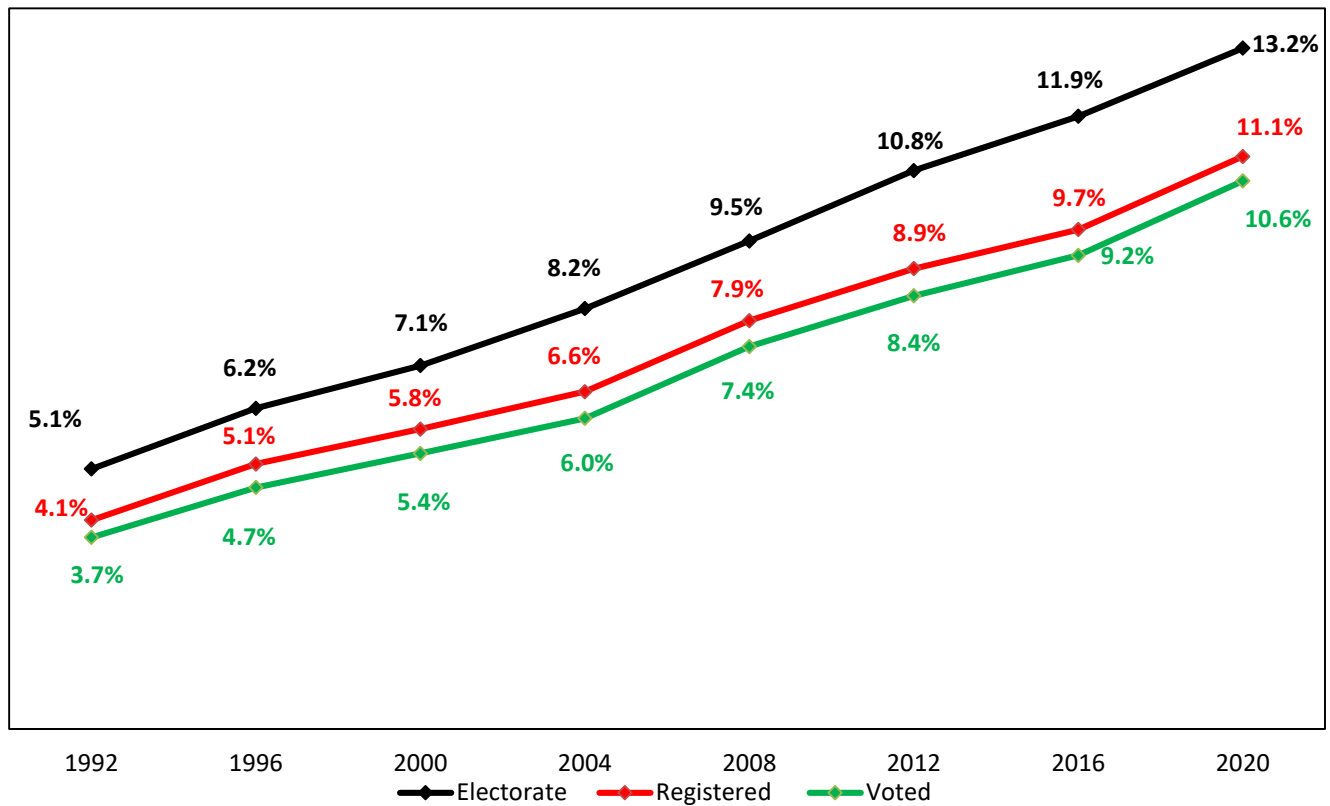
Demographic growth, and increase in both registration and voting rates, resulted in a constantly increasing Latino portion of the electorate and voting public between 1992 and 2020. For the 2020 presidential election, 13.2% of all eligible voters in the U.S. were Latinos; 11.1% of all eligible voters, and 10.6% of all votes cast were Latino votes, an increase from 9.2% in 2016. (See figure 6).

One of the major reasons for the extraordinary increase in Latino voter registration and participation in the 2020 presidential election was the very significant rise in registration and voting by younger Latinos. Nearly 60% of all potential Latino voters were between 18 and 44 years of age and these younger Latinos had relatively low voter registration and participation rates in previous presidential elections. (See Table 1 for age structure data).

Table 1
Age Structure of the Latino Electorate,
Registered Voters, and Latinos who Voted
Presidential Election 2020
(in percentages of totals)

Age Category	Electorate	Registered Voters	Actual Votes
18-24	18.5%	15.1%	14.2%
25-44	40.6%	40.0%	39.3%
45-64	27.9%	30.3%	31.3%
65-74	8.2%	9.2%	9.9%
75+	4.8%	5.4%	5.4%

Figure 6
 Latinos as a Percentage of the total U.S. Electorate, Registered Voters, and Voters
 Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020



Voters by Age Category and Sex

In the 2016 presidential election, only 34.3% of Latinos who were between 18 and 24 years of age and eligible to vote actually cast ballots. This soared to 41.2% in 2020. Among the Latino electorate between 25 and 44 years of age, 46.1% voted in 2016 and 51.9% in 2020. In fact, Latino voter participation rates soared between 2016 and 2020, even among older Latino voters: from 54.5% to 60.3% among 45-to-64-year-olds; 59% to 65% among 65-to-74-year-olds; and 53.1 to 60% among those Latino voters 75 years of age and older. (see figure 7).

Latinas voted at significantly higher rates than Latinos in 2020 in all categories below 64 years of age, although among those Latino voters 65 and older, men voted at higher rates than women. (See figure 8 for precise data).

Figure 7
 Percentage of Latino Electorate Voting by Age Category, Presidential Elections of 2016 and 2020

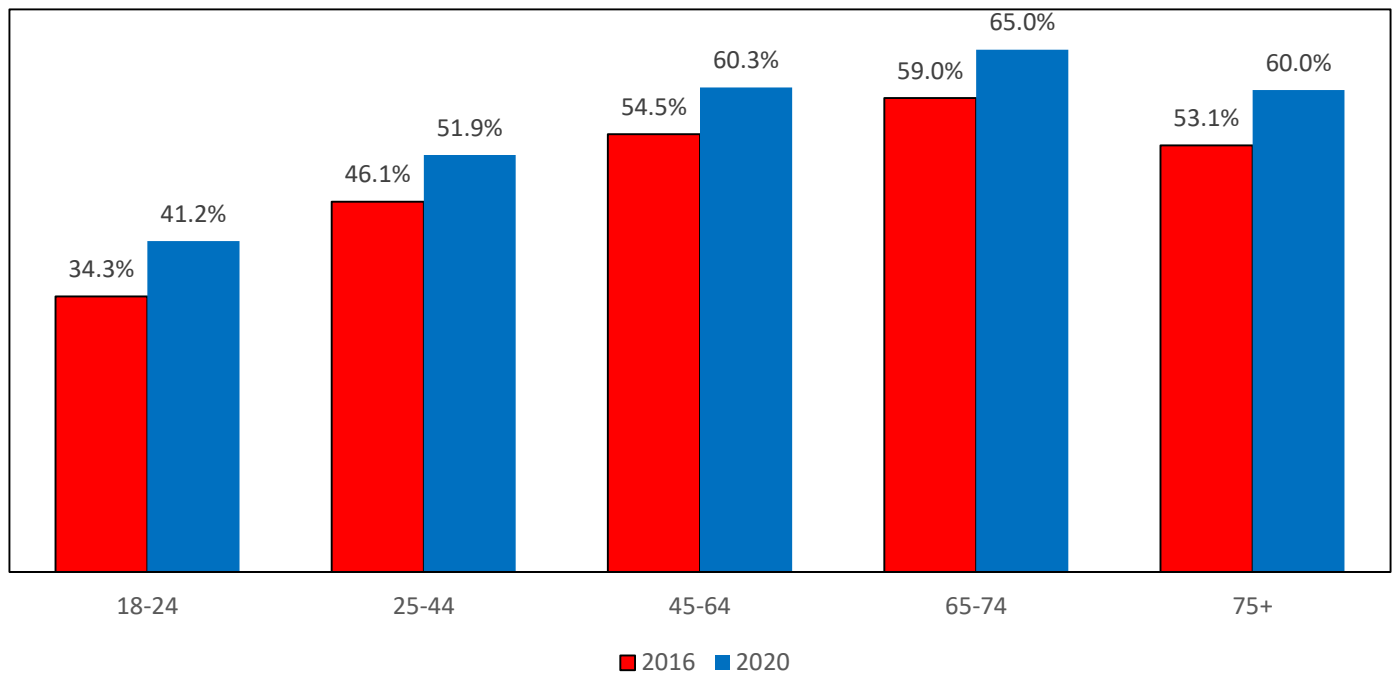
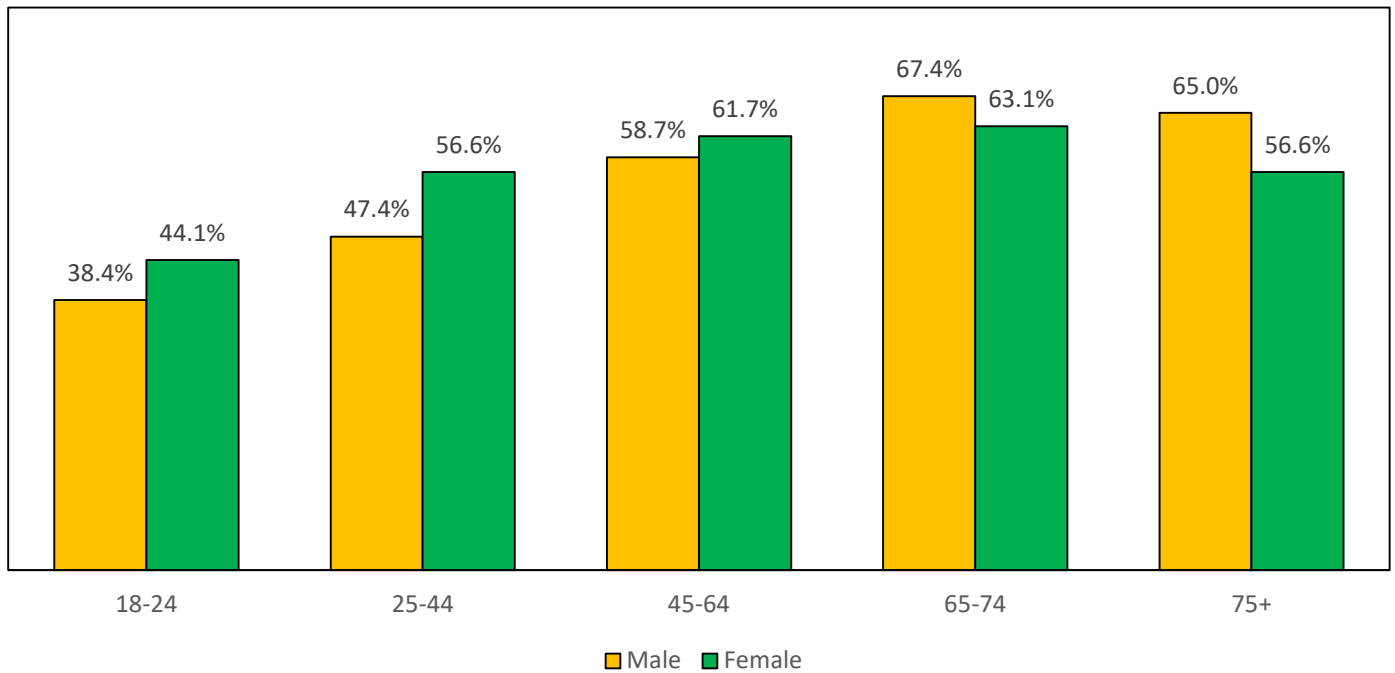


Figure 8
 Percentage of Latino Electorate Voting by Sex and Age Category, Presidential Election of 2020



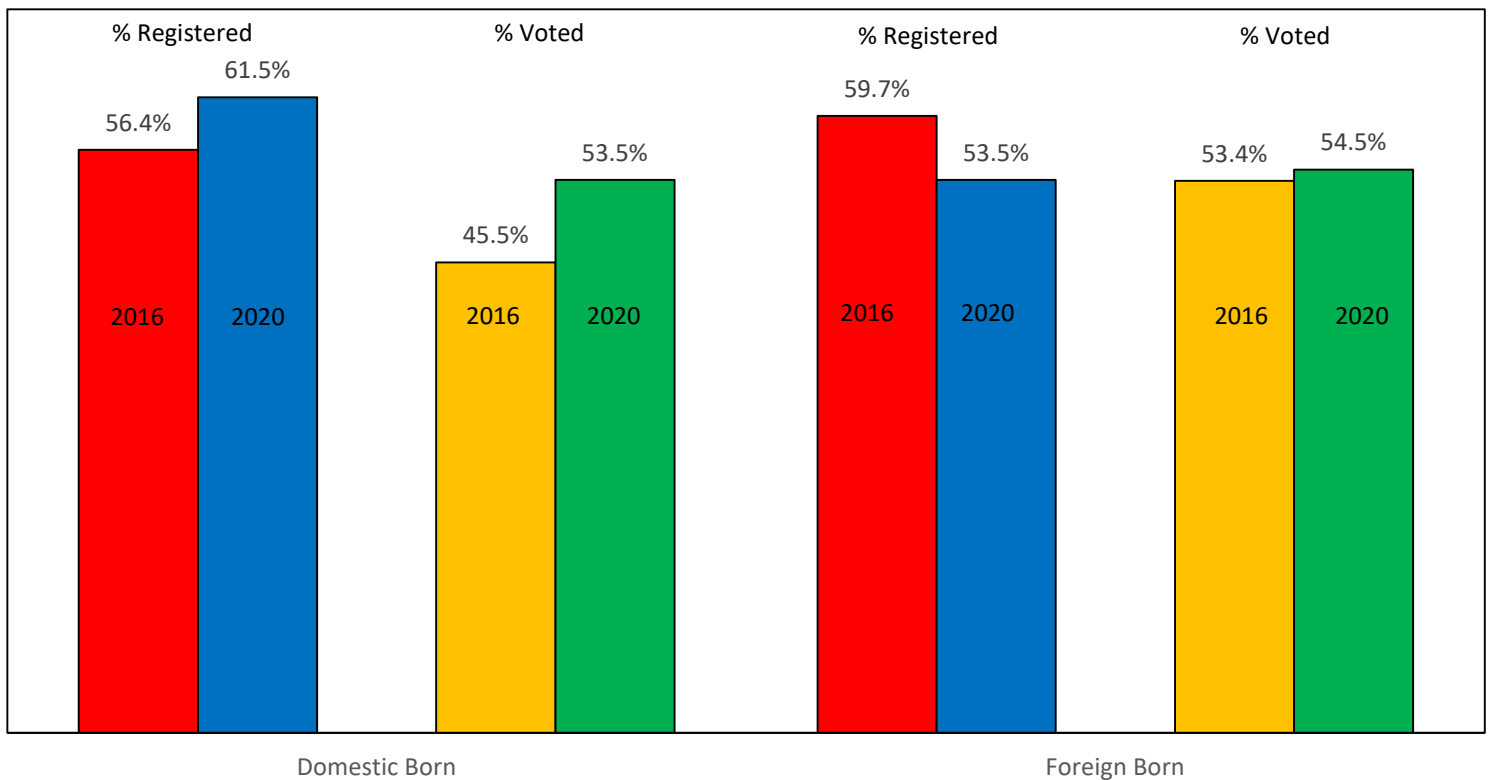
Voters by Nativity

A final factor explaining the higher registration and participation rates among Latinos in the 2020 election was the significant surge in both rates among Latinos born in the U.S., compared with naturalized and foreign-born Latinos. Over 71% of all Latino eligible voters in 2020 were U.S.-born.

Among U.S.-born Latinos, registration rates increased from 56.4% in 2016 to 61.5% in 2020. Voting rates rose from 45.5% to 53.5% among Latinos born in the U.S. These increases among Latinos born in the U.S. were the principal statistical cause of the overall surge in registration and voting rates in the 2020 presidential election.

This conclusion is brought into sharp focus by noting that registration rates among naturalized Latinos actually declined from 59.7% in 2016 to 53.5% in 2020. Voting rates among foreign-born Latinos increased marginally, from 53.4% in 2016 to 54.5% in 2020. Thus, for the first time in the history of U.S. presidential elections, U.S.-born and foreign-born Latino citizens voted at about the same rates. (See figure 9).

Figure 9
 Latino Registration and Voting Rates by Nativity in Presidential Elections 2016 - 2020



Note: Domestic-born Latinos accounted for 71.3% of all Latino votes cast in 2016; and 74.4% of all Latino votes cast in 2020.

These extraordinary increases in registration and voting rates among Latinos may be an important indicator of future Latino political influence and power. Still, however, there is much room for even further improvements in formal electoral political participation. Latinos still had the lowest registration and voting rates among the major race/ethnic groups in the U.S. in 2020, as was the case in 2016 and before. (See figures 10 and 11). This fact, however, should not obscure the great improvements noted previously.

Figure 10
 Percentage of Electorate Registered and Voted by Race/Ethnicity
 Presidential Election, 2016

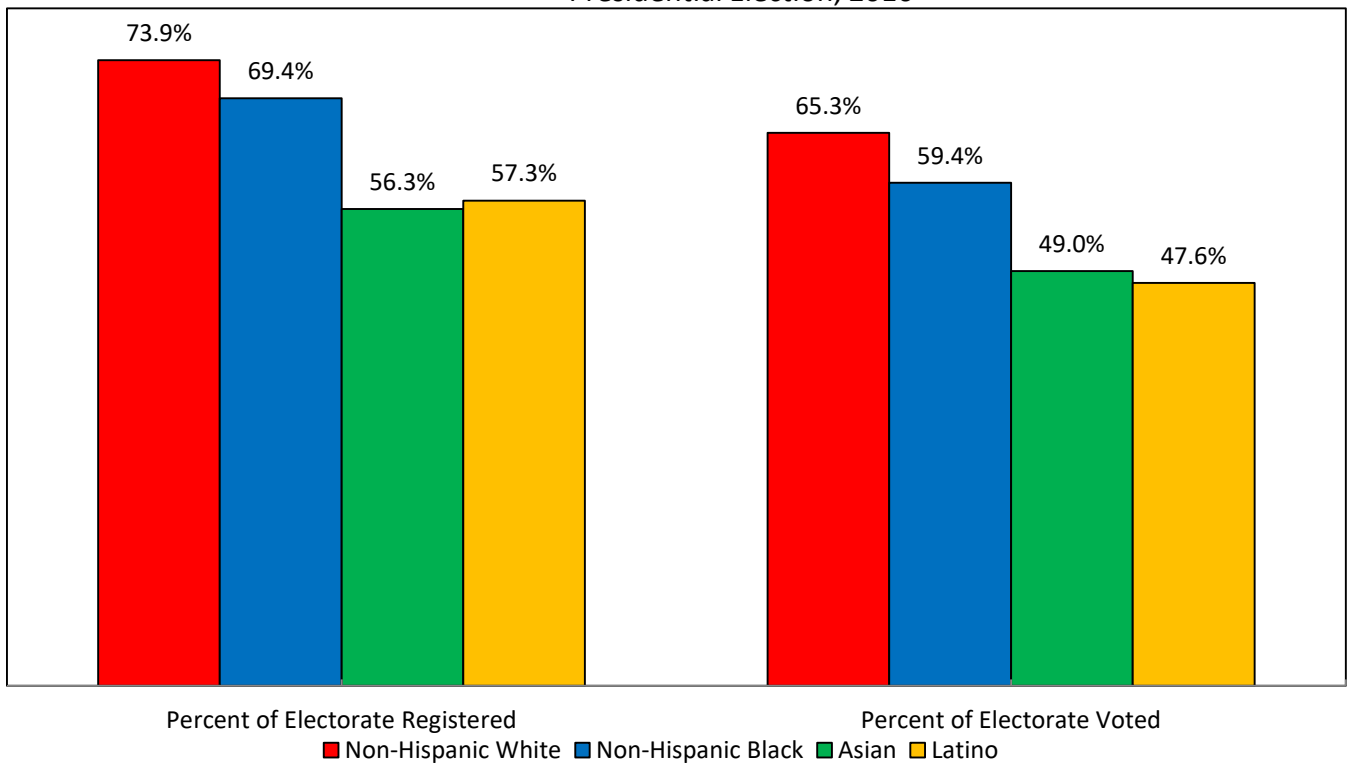
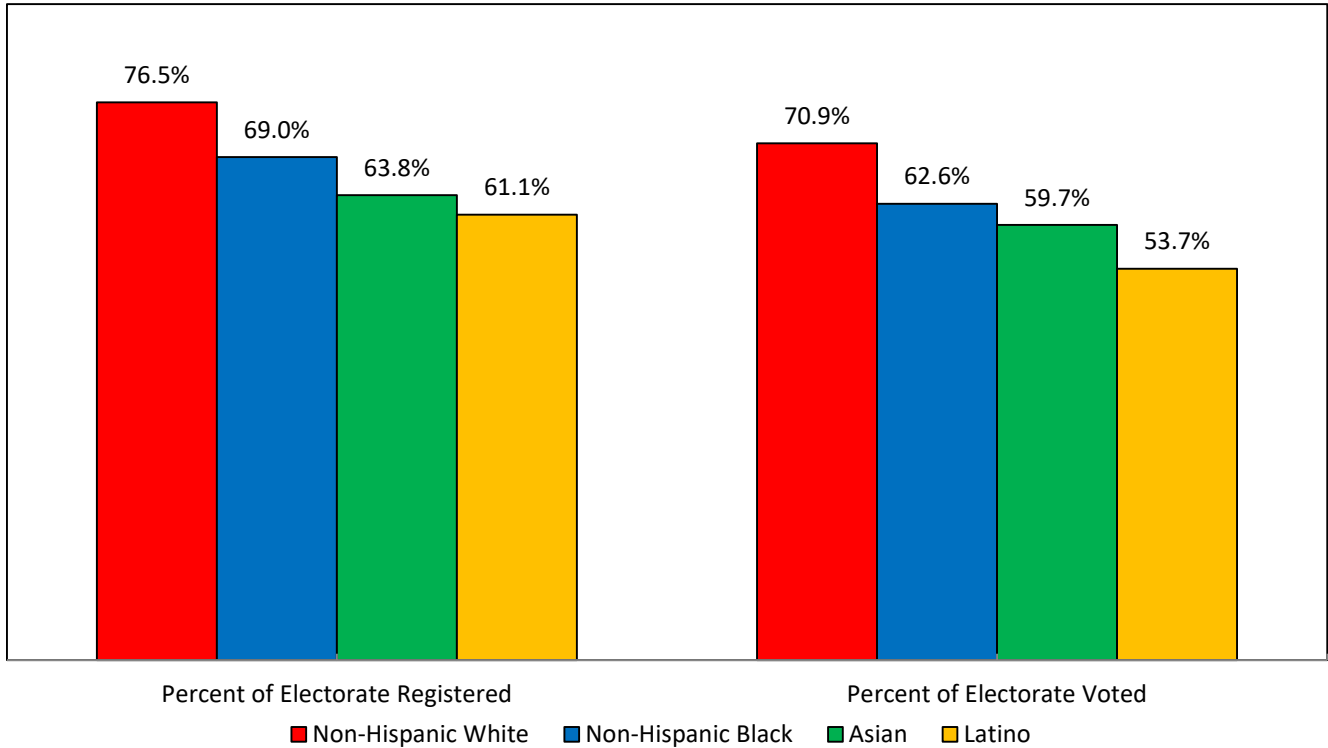


Figure 11
 Percentage of Electorate Registered and Voted by Race/Ethnicity
 Presidential Election, 2020



There were significant increases in Latino voter registration and participation rates in states which were critical for the 2020 election, and important rises in the absolute votes cast. This was the case in states with large Latino populations such as Arizona, Florida, Texas, and smaller states as well.

In Arizona, the voting rate rose from 47.4% in 2016 to 60.8% in 2020, and the absolute number of votes cast by Latinos increased by 49.9% from 543,000 to 814,000. This very well may have been a factor in the narrow Democratic victory in the state.

In Texas, between 2016 and 2020 the Latino voting rate increased from 55.5% to 63.2%, while the actual number of Latino votes rose by 53.4%, from 1,938,000 to 2,972,000, an extraordinary increase.

In Georgia, between 2016 and 2020 Latino votes rose by 10.6%, and increased from 161,000 to 178,000. These Latino votes, in a state with a relatively small Latino electorate, may have contributed to the Biden victory in Georgia.

A similar observation may be made about Pennsylvania, where Latino votes rose from 229,000 in 2016 to 270,000 in 2020.

(See tables 2 and 3 for complete data).

Conclusion

The data presented in this report mark a very distinctive break with the past among Latinos eligible to vote. From the 1992 presidential election and before, Latino voter registration rates rarely surpassed 58% and the voting rate was never greater than half of all eligible Latino voters. Since then, both rates have increased steadily until the 2020 election.

This was despite the fact that there was a constant increase in the absolute number of Latino voters because of demographic increase. The surge in both registration and voting rates described here suggest that Latinos are poised to exert political influence in the U.S. commensurate with their share of the population. The mid-term elections and the presidential election of 2024 may confirm that the often-called 'sleeping giant' of U.S. electoral politics is ready to emerge in full force.

Table 2
Changes in Latino Registration and Voting Rates in Selected States
2016 - 2020

	2016	2020	% Increase
Arizona			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	57.1%	66.8%	17.0%
Latino Voting Rate	47.4%	60.8%	28.3%
Florida			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	62.0%	58.7%	-5.3%
Latino Voting Rate	54.1%	52.7%	-2.6%
Georgia			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	50.2%	47.6%	-5.2%
Latino Voting Rate	47.9%	44.2%	-7.7%
Michigan			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	49.0%	58.9%	20.2%
Latino Voting Rate	36.0%	54.7%	51.9%
Pennsylvania			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	62.9%	61.4%	-2.4%
Latino Voting Rate	51.7%	54.3%	5.0%
Texas			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	55.5%	63.2%	13.9%
Latino Voting Rate	40.5%	53.1%	31.1%
Wisconsin			
Latino Voter Registration Rate	52.1%	61.0%	17.1%
Latino Voting Rate	42.8%	58.4%	36.4%

Note: The registration rate is the percentage of all eligible voters (citizens 18+ years of age) registered. The voting rate is the percentage of all eligible voters (citizens 18*) who voted.

Table 3
Changes in Latino Voting in Selected States, 2016 - 2020

	2016	2020	% Increase
Arizona			
Number of Latino Voters	543,000	814,000	49.9%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	19.6%	22.3%	
Florida			
Number of Latino Voters	1,552,000	1,789,000	15.3%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	18.1%	18.4%	
Georgia			
Number of Latino Voters	161,000	178,000	10.6%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	3.8%	3.6%	
Michigan			
Number of Latino Voters	74,000	165,000	123.0%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	1.6%	3.3%	
Pennsylvania			
Number of Latino Voters	229,000	270,000	17.9%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	3.8%	4.0%	
Texas			
Number of Latino Voters	1,938,000	2,972,000	53.4%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	20.1%	25.0%	
Wisconsin			
Number of Latino Voters	111,000	101,000	-9.0%
Latino voters as % of all votes cast	3.6%	3.1%	