

# LATINOS CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



**Tufts**  
UNIVERSITY

Jonathan M. Tisch  
College of Citizenship  
and Public Service



**National Conference on Citizenship**  
*Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.*



## ABOUT NCoC

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a congressionally chartered organization dedicated to strengthening civic life in America. We pursue our mission through a nationwide network of partners involved in a cutting-edge civic health initiative, an innovative national service project, and our cross-sector conferences. At the core of our joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their community and country thrive.

Congress chartered NCoC in 1953 to harness the patriotic energy and civic involvement surrounding World War II. We've been dedicated to this charge ever since. In 2009, Congress named NCoC in the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, once again memorializing our important role. This legislation codified and expanded our Civic Health Initiative (CHI) helping it become the nation's largest and most definitive measure of civic engagement.

NCoC's CHI is at the center of our work. Leveraging civic data made possible by the Corporation for National & Community Service, we have partnered with dozens of states, cities, and issue groups to draft reports and action plans to strengthen civic life. This initiative has also been an important incubator for programs such as the Civic Data Challenge and *The Civic 50*. Each program has used data and 21st century tools to create locally led, collective impact across our country. By 2020, we plan to integrate this pioneering initiative into ongoing partnerships in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Latinos are spearheading America's demographic shift and influencing the country's civic life. Only four decades ago, Latinos made up just 4.7% of the US population. In 2014, that number was 17.4%.<sup>1</sup> This increased presence represents a critical civic asset that deserves rigorous examination and discussion.

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In the 1980s, Latinos were described as America's sleeping giant. Over the decades, they have gradually increased their civic aptitude, but have yet to become fully engaged. In fact, Latino civic health continues to lag behind non-Latinos. However, there are signs the sleeping giant is beginning to stir.

Latino youth are at the forefront of increased civic engagement within the Latino community. A new finding from this report shows that young Latinos are utilizing technology, education, and English language proficiency to engage in civic life like no previous generation. Together, they are reshaping the fabric of their social networks and strengthening their communities and our country.

To best understand Latino civic life, this report primarily utilizes one of the largest and deepest data sets covering the topic – the US Census Current Population Survey supplements on Voting, Volunteering, and Civic Engagement.<sup>i</sup> Additional data from the Pew Research Center, National Commission on Voting Rights, and others are also utilized. With this data and representative case studies, the report discusses barriers facing Latino civic engagement and opportunities for civic growth. Understanding these factors are important steps for expanding the conversation, cultivating interest, and engaging the public about the civic role of Latinos in American society.

## Key Findings

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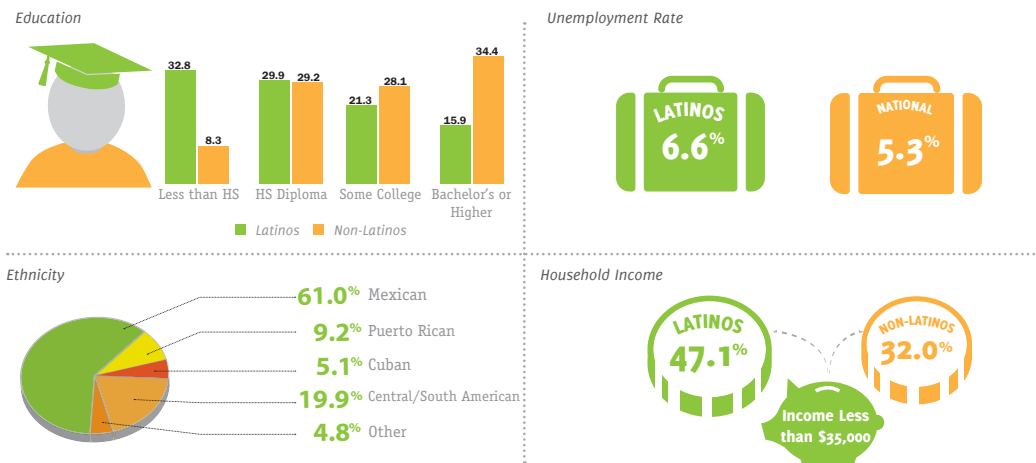
- **The Latino population has grown exponentially and is an increasingly important contributor to America's civic strength.** In 1970, 4.7% of Americans identified themselves as Latinos vs. 17.4% in 2014.
- **Overall, Latino civic health lags behind non-Latinos.** Latinos participate less in both voting and non-voting forms of political activity, and generally have lower social cohesion than other racial groups.
  - 35% of Latinos versus 59% of non-Latinos trusted most or all of the people in their neighborhood.
  - In the 2012 Presidential Election, 48% of Latino eligible voters turned out to vote, versus 67% of Blacks and 64% of Whites.
- **There are no clear trends when comparing Latino subgroups.** Variations in civic participation vary widely according to factors such as age, ethnicity, and education.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Lack of education is a major challenge. Latinos are less educated than non-Latinos, which directly impacts participation in civic life.**
  - Educational attainment is the strongest predictor of civic participation.
  - 76% of Latinos complete high school, compared to 94% of non-Latino whites.<sup>2</sup>
- **Citizenship combined with English language proficiency has a clear, positive correlation with civic participation.**
  - 8 in 10 Latinos who are citizens are registered to vote primarily speak English. In contrast, only about 2 in 10 Spanish dominant Latino citizens are registered to vote.<sup>3</sup>

i. The Current Population Survey excludes undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

ii. Results from statistical analysis that considers all these measures in one model, to determine which factors are most important to civic engagement, reveals some important findings. First and foremost, while Latino origin does matter (non-Latinos are more likely to be engaged than Latinos), it is not the most important determinant of civic engagement. Educational attainment is the strongest predictor of civic participation.

- **The data shows that prospects for greater Latino engagement are bright and invested largely in Latino youth.** Improving educational opportunities, English language proficiency, and higher-than-average rates of social media usage create increased avenues to engagement.
  - Latino youth Internet users access social networking sites at higher rates (80%) than non-Latino whites (70%) and African Americans (75%).<sup>4</sup>
  - Lower income Latino youth are more likely than their higher income Latino counterparts to use social media. This makes social media an especially attractive tool to spur increased engagement with this potentially difficult to reach demographic.
  - More Latinos are likely to speak English or be bilingual because a majority (93%) are now native born.
  - Educational success is improving. Since 1993, the Latino dropout rate has been cut in half (33% vs. 14%) and more Latinos are entering college.<sup>5</sup>

## Latino Demographics



## What is Civic Health?

Civic health is a community's capacity to work together to resolve collective problems. It is defined by the degree to which people trust each other, help their neighbors, and interact with their government.

On an individual level, civic health is shown to improve people's overall health—physical, emotional, social, and mental. On a community level, civic health forms the foundation for growth and improvement. Strong civic health positively affects local GDP, economic resilience, upward income mobility, public health, and student achievement. Simply put, when people are civically engaged, they are healthier, and their communities are stronger.

For the purpose of this report, civic health is assessed by examining numerous studies and data sources, including Census data, related to volunteering, voting, political participation, group membership, and social connectedness.

## Goals of This Report

- **Support a community dialogue regarding the civic participation of the Latino community.**
- **Strengthen civic and social opportunities for all Latinos.**
- **Provide recommendations for next steps in research.**

# LANDSCAPE OF LATINO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Foreign-born Latinos make up 47.4% of the US Latino population (30.1% of which are not citizens), compared to 51.7% of native-born Latinos.<sup>6</sup> The current percent of Latino immigrants today is lower than in the 1980s and 1990s when immigration was the Latino population main driver. Although there has been a recent shift in the primary source of Latino growth, from immigrant to native-born Latinos, there are still many foreign-born Latinos in the US.

Ethnic heritage and regional diversity affects levels of Latino civic engagement across subgroups. This diversity helps establish how they define civic engagement and levels of participation. As a result, differences among Latino subgroups reveal much about Latino civic health.

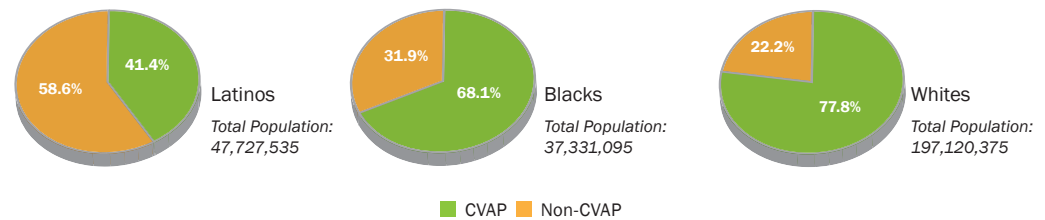
## VOTING & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### Voting

Voting is often viewed as the strongest measure of direct civic participation because it demonstrates a clear investment in one's community and country. The Census Bureau uses the "Citizen Voting Age Population" (CVAP) to best understand voting behaviors. Chart 1 below shows the Citizen Voting Age Population, compared to the total population by group for Latinos, Blacks, and Whites.<sup>7</sup>



**Chart 1. Citizen Voting Age Population and Total Population, Per Group**

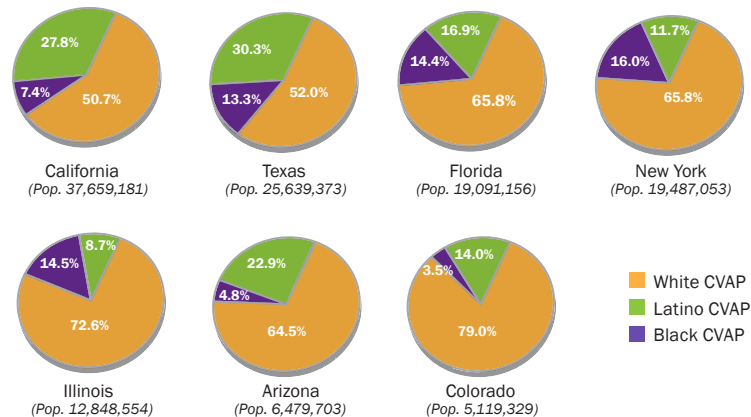


Source: Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) Special Tabulation From the 2006-2010 5-Year American Community Survey, calculated by the US Census Bureau. [https://www.census.gov/rdo/data/voting\\_age\\_population\\_by\\_citizenship\\_and\\_race\\_cvap.html](https://www.census.gov/rdo/data/voting_age_population_by_citizenship_and_race_cvap.html)

The Latino CVAP as a percentage of the total group population is 41%. In comparison, the Black and White CVAP as a percentage of total group population are 68% and 78%, respectively. Latinos significantly lag behind other groups due to two main factors: 1) Latinos are younger than non-Latinos and, 2) the percentage of Latinos who are un-naturalized immigrants.

It is useful to look at state level CVAP data, since the size of the Latino population varies significantly across the country. Chart 2 shows the Citizen Voting Age Population for Latinos, Blacks, and Whites, respectively, as a percentage of total CVAP, across some of the most Latino populous states (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Colorado, and Arizona).<sup>8</sup>

**Chart 2. CVAP in Latino Populous States**



Source: <http://votingrightstoday.org/ncvr/resources/state-pages>

As the size of the Latino population increases, so does their share of the CVAP. In California and Texas (the two most Latino populous states), Latinos make up about a third of the total citizens who are eligible to vote. Therefore, by increasing their share of the population, Latinos are poised to increase their voting eligibility numbers. Additionally, improved efforts at naturalizing eligible immigrants will help increase voter engagement.

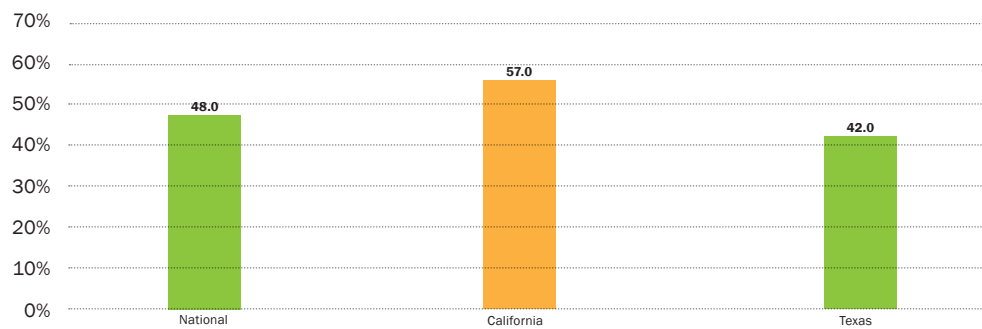
One interesting and perhaps counterintuitive fact about Latino voter participation is that naturalized Latinos have higher voter turnout rates than native-born Latinos. For example, in 2008, 54% of naturalized Latino citizens cast a ballot. This was six percentage points higher than native-born Latinos, 48% of whom went to the polls that year.<sup>9</sup>

It is not clear why naturalized Latinos are more likely to vote. However, one of the main reasons given by Latino immigrants for naturalizing is specifically to gain the right to vote. Researchers and pollsters argue that naturalized Latinos may be better socialized and educated about the right to vote more so than native-born Latinos who did not have to go through the process to gain the opportunity to cast a ballot. In other words, naturalized Latinos have a greater sense of voter efficacy and often a better understanding of the American political system than those born in the US.<sup>10</sup> There are about 5.4 million Latino adult legal permanent residents who have not yet naturalized.<sup>11</sup> Given the rate at which naturalized Latinos vote, this is a significant potential area of greater civic and political engagement for Latinos.

In the 2012 Presidential Election, 48% of eligible Latinos voted. This number is significantly lower than voter turnout rates for Blacks (66.6%) and whites (64.1%).<sup>12</sup> Even in the two most populous Latino states—California and Texas—there are disparities in Latinos who are eligible to vote and those who actually come out to vote. In California, in the 2012 elections, only about 57% of eligible Latinos came out to the polls. In Texas, Latino turnout was even lower—only about 42% of those eligible cast a ballot.<sup>13</sup>

**48.0%**  
of Latinos voted in the 2012  
Presidential Election.

**Chart 3. Eligible Latinos Who Voted in the 2012 Presidential Election**



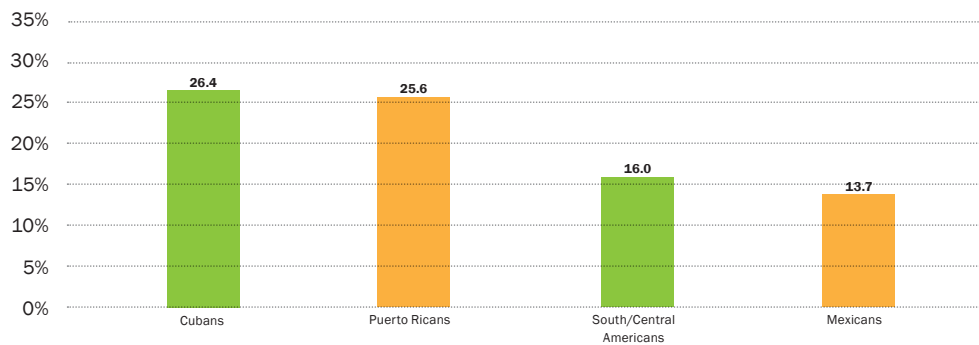
Source: National Association of Latino Elected Officials. "Early Results Demonstrate Electoral Clout of Latino Voters."

Differences also exist in levels of voter participation among Latino subgroups, particularly in local elections where overall voter turnout is lower. The Census Bureau's Civic Engagement Supplement shows that 26.4% of Cubans always vote in local elections, compared to 25.6% of Puerto Ricans, 16.0% of South/Central Americans, and 13.7% of Mexicans. The rates are similar when the voting condition is relaxed (when the question is posed as "sometimes" voting instead of "always" voting). Cubans and Puerto Ricans are more likely to sometimes vote in elections than other Latinos. These two groups are also the least likely to say they never vote in local elections (42.3% and 42.7%, respectively). By contrast, 61.9% of Mexicans and 61.7% of South/Central Americans say they never vote in these elections.

**33.3%**

of Latinos didn't vote because they were not interested, compared to 45.2% of non-Latinos.

**Chart 4. Latinos Who Always Vote in Local Elections**

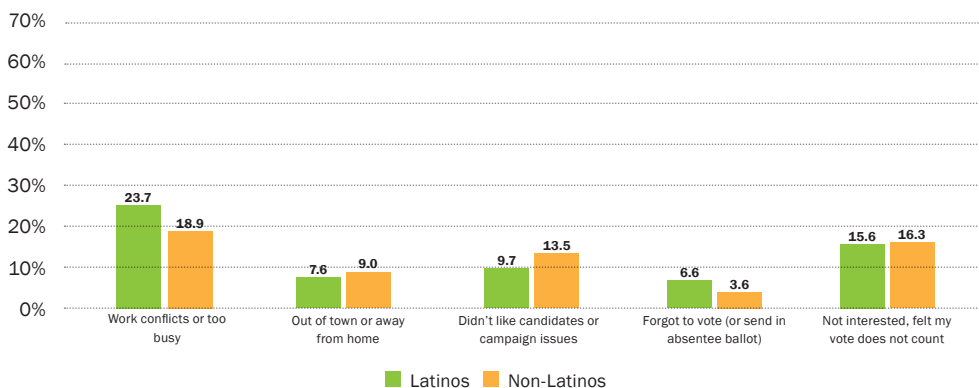


Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

According to the 2012 CPS Voting Supplement, significantly more Latino citizens than non-Latinos are not registered to vote (41.3% to 27.3%). There are a number of reasons why Latinos who are eligible do not register or vote. First, almost a quarter of Latino respondents who are registered to vote (23.7%) cite conflicts with work or being too busy to vote, compared to 18.9% of non-Latinos. Latinos are also more likely to say they do not meet voter registration deadlines (16.3%) compared to non-Latinos (14.1%), or that they did not know how or where to register and vote (6.8% of Latinos, compared to 4.3% of non-Latinos).

A portion of both Latinos and non-Latinos state that they do not vote because they feel their vote does not count (16.3% of Latinos, compared to 15.6% of non-Latinos). This indicates an issue of voter apathy across different demographic groups. Interestingly, though, Latinos are less likely than non-Latinos to say they do not register to vote because they are not interested (33.3%, compared to 45.2% of non-Latinos who are not registered to vote).

**Chart 5. Reasons Eligible Latinos and Non-Latinos Do Not Vote**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Voting Supplement

The data show better efforts can be made to mobilize current Latino eligible voters. Candidates, parties, and community groups should address resource-deficient areas such as education and economic opportunities, as well as greater mobilization efforts. Research has shown that Latinos can be mobilized to vote, with the proper incentives, resources, and investment in get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts.

A recent empirical study shows that GOTV campaigns, even for local elections, are much more effective on Latinos than non-Latinos. Many get-out-the-vote efforts involve door-to-door canvassing or multiple phone calls to inform and engage voters.<sup>14</sup> Mobilizing Latinos is a more straightforward solution to increasing participation than fixing other structural barriers that often prevent Latinos from other, more time-consuming forms of civic engagement.

# CASE STUDY 1

## MI FAMILIA VOTA, HOUSTON TEXAS

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Mi Familia Vota Education Fund (MFVED) began as a series of citizenship and voter registration activities in California. Their goal is to broaden the Latino electorate and develop Latino civic participation. The initial campaign of “Mi Familia Vota 100%” was launched by the Organization of Los Angeles Workers (OLAW), a non-partisan civic organization. OLAW’s mission is to expand the voice of the Latino community through civic education, citizenship, and voter registration and mobilization campaigns. The campaign builds on the community’s family values to cement the belief that, in order to succeed, everyone has to participate; that voting is a social, not an individual isolated act.

Today, the Mi Familia Vota Education Fund has offices in California, Texas, Arizona, Florida, Colorado, and Nevada. They work within Latino communities to strengthen Latino electoral participation. In Houston, MFVED finds success by working with local institutions to encourage Latino voter participation. Staff and volunteers work with high schools, universities, and community colleges to set up tables and stage assemblies encouraging students to vote. They find that direct and consistent interaction with students is crucial to their voter outreach. Doing this develops a social accountability system that has influenced other generations of voters.

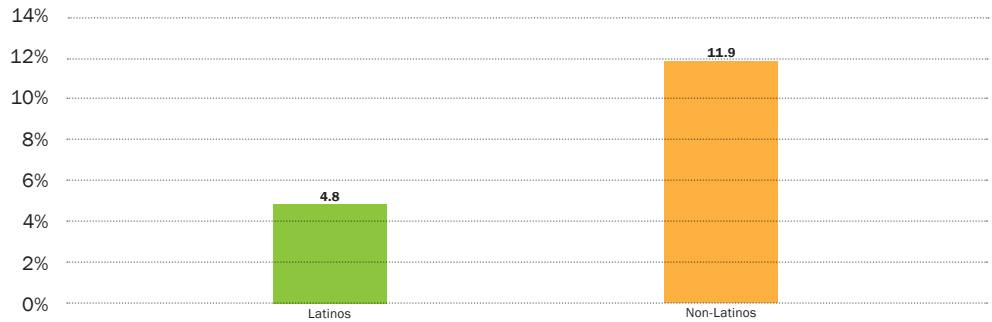
Students are the access point through which MFVED reaches out to the broader Latino community for voter registration efforts. For example, when giving classroom presentations, MFVED staff lead students through hands-on activities, and register them to vote on-site. Once registered, students are asked to participate in a phone bank so that they can call their neighbors and encourage them to register and vote as well. During one election, students organized a march from their school to the local polling site to broadcast their actions to the community.

The Houston office of MFVED found social networks and partnerships are invaluable assets for developing outreach strategies. In 2012, MFVED, partnering with Univision, challenged local high schools to register as many voters as possible in two days. Twelve high schools competed for the chance to send students on a private tour of Univision. Since Texas requires that individuals be deputized in order to register voters, MFVED partnered with the NAACP and NALEO to build capacity and provide deputized staff in each high school. Dozens of volunteers from within the community (even citizens who were not eligible to vote) and parents helped to promote the challenge and encourage individuals to register. As a result, more than 1000 people were registered to vote at the end of the 48-hour challenge.

## Other Indicators of Political Participation

Since many non-citizen Latinos are unable to vote, it is important to analyze other forms of non-electoral civic engagement. One common form of non-electoral participation is whether a person contacts or visits a public official. When asked if they have ever contacted or visited a public official, only 4.8% of Latino respondents answered in the affirmative, compared to 11.9% of non-Latinos.

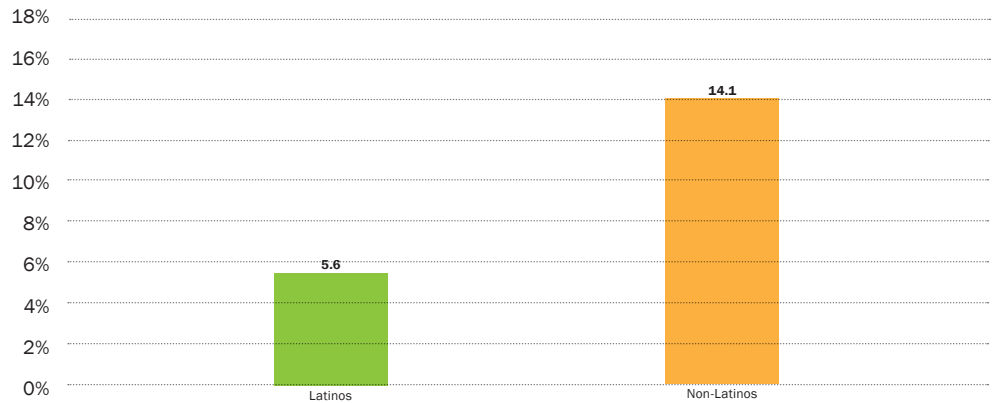
**Chart 6. Contacting Public Officials (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

Another measure of political engagement is choosing to boycott or buycott a service or product. Latinos are less than half as likely (5.6%) as non-Latinos (14.1%) to say they have ever taken such an action. Beyond voting, Latinos also lag behind other forms of non-electoral political participation, compared to their non-Latino counterparts. Here, again, more effort can be made to increase Latino awareness about avenues to political engagement. Better outreach efforts by interested groups that go beyond voting can go a long way toward increasing Latino political participation.

**Chart 7. Boycott or Buycott Products or Services (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

When it comes to discussing politics with personal networks, Latinos are less likely than non-Latinos to engage in this manner. The results show that political discussions with family and friends occur more irregularly for Latinos. Among the subgroups, Cubans discuss politics with family and friends more often than other Latinos.

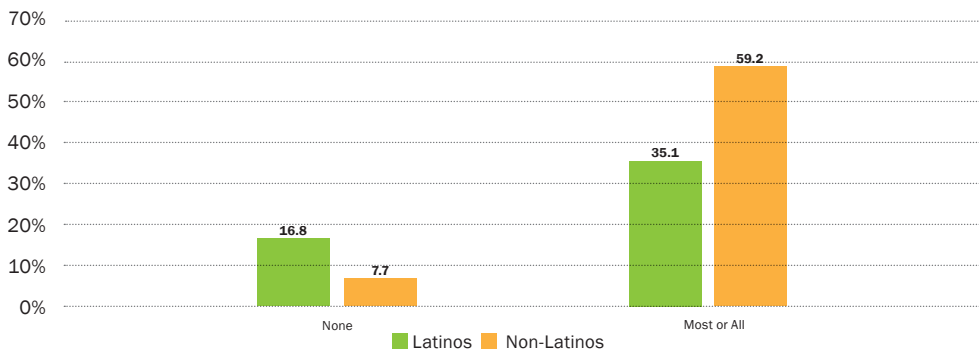
# BROAD MEASURES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement goes far beyond voting and political participation. Broader measures such as interactions with neighbors, groups, and institutions all contribute to civic life. This report examines differences in participation between Latinos and non-Latinos and distinctions in participation among Latino subgroups-based on country of origin and citizenship status.

## Social Connectedness

Social trust is an important element of civic engagement. It can lead to greater engagement as well as result from it. The Census Bureau’s Civic Engagement Supplement asked respondents whether they trust people in their neighborhood. The data suggests that Latinos are less trusting of their neighbors than non-Latinos. A little more than a third of Latinos (35.1%) expressed that they either trusted most or all of the people in their neighborhood compared to more than half of non-Latinos (59.2%). Further, 16.8% of Latinos stated that they trust none of the people in their neighborhood, while 7.7% of non-Latinos stated this level of mistrust.

**Chart 8. Trust the People in Your Neighborhood (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



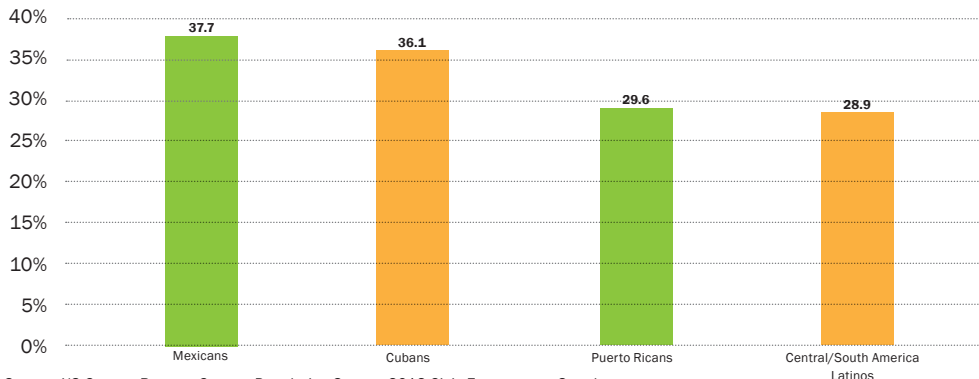
Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

**37.7%**

of Mexicans trust most or all of their neighbors, the highest of any Latino ethnicity.

Variations in levels of neighborhood trust also exist among Latino subgroups based on country of origin. Mexicans trust their neighbors the most – 37.7% say they trust most or all of their neighbors. Cubans are not far behind with 36.1% expressing this level of trust. By comparison, Puerto Ricans (29.6%) and Central/South American Latinos (28.9%) report trusting their neighbors less.

**Chart 9. Trust Most or All People in Your Neighborhood**

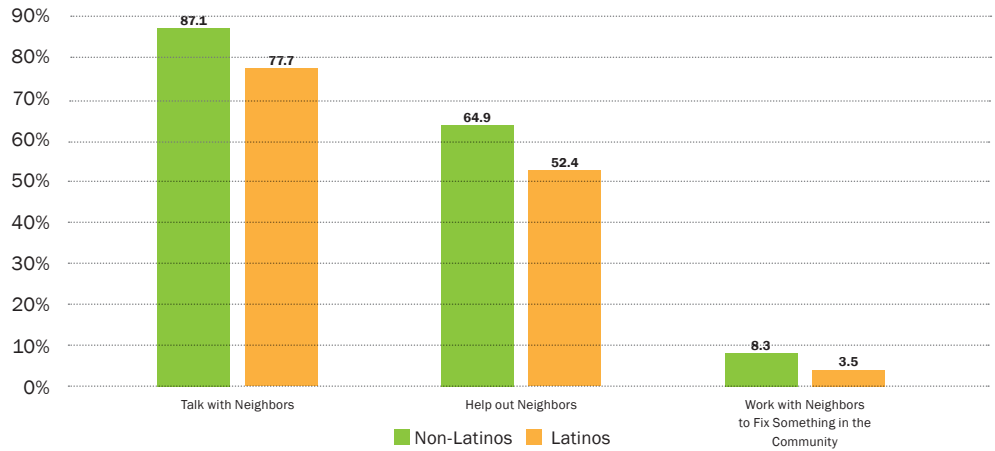


Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

Latinos' trust levels may be tied to the large portion that are new community members. A third of Latinos (33%) surveyed for the Civic Engagement Supplement had lived in their current community for less than 2 years. In comparison, less than a quarter of non-Latinos (24.8%) had resided in their current community for a similar amount of time. In addition, 50.5% of Latinos and 63.3% of non-Latinos had lived in their community for five years or more. The lack of long-term residency, coupled with other factors such as a language barrier, may contribute to lower levels of trust.

On several measures of interaction, Latinos connect less with their neighbors on a regular basis than do non-Latinos. As Chart 10 illustrates, Latinos are somewhat less likely than non-Latinos to talk with their neighbors, help out their neighbors, or work with neighbors to fix something.<sup>15</sup>

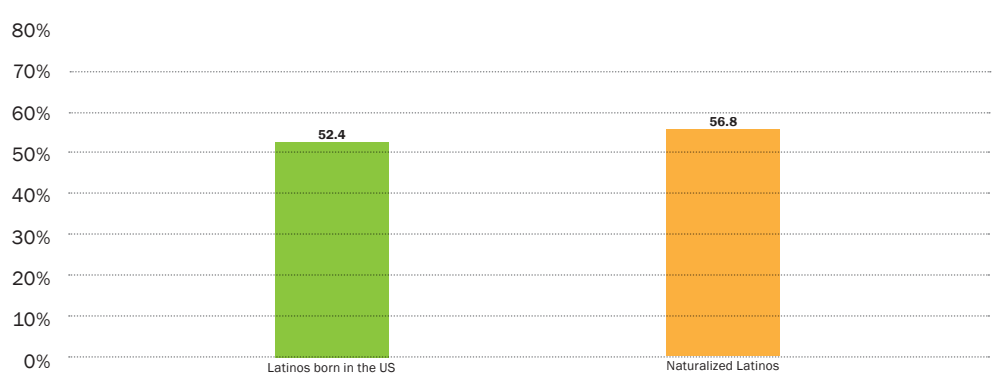
**Chart 10. Interactions with Neighbors (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

When it comes to interaction with neighbors, Latinos vary most significantly by citizenship status. Latino citizens, both native born and naturalized, are more likely than non-citizen Latinos to exchange favors with their neighbors. More than half of Latinos who are citizens (52.4% of US-born and 56.8% of those naturalized) say they help out their neighbors at least once a month to a few times a week. In comparison, just under half (49.9%) of Latinos who are not citizens assist their neighbors with this range of frequency.

**Chart 11. Help Out Neighbors At Least Once a Month to a Few Times Per Week**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

Little variation exists in levels of neighborhood interaction among Latinos based on country of origin or heritage. More than half of Puerto Ricans (53.3%), Mexicans (52.9%), Cubans (50.7%), and Central/South Americans (50.7%) say they assisted their neighbors at least once a month to a few times a week. It does not appear that Latino subgroup characteristics—citizenship status and country of origin/heritage—significantly affect this form of civic engagement.

## Volunteering

According to Census data, volunteering among Latinos (15.5%) is significantly lower than among non-Latinos (27.2%). Among volunteers, Latinos spend about the same amount of time volunteering as non-Latino volunteers (128 hours and 121 hours a year, respectively). About the same proportion in both groups are considered “regular volunteers” who serve 12 or more weeks a year (51.4% among non-Latinos and 50.7% among Latinos).

As a group, Latinos were more likely to focus their volunteering efforts at one organization, and one type of activity, compared to the non-Latino population. The most popular forms of volunteering among Latinos include tutoring (12.7%), collecting food and goods (9.7%), and providing general labor (9.7%). Volunteering activities were overall similar among Latinos and non-Latinos, but Latinos were somewhat more likely to volunteer as tutors/mentors and somewhat less likely to lend their professional services as volunteers.

One subtle but key difference has to do with how Latinos become volunteers. 37.5% of the Latino volunteers said that they were asked to serve, compared to 41.1% among non-Latinos. Furthermore, Latinos were less likely to be asked to serve by a relative, a friend, or a coworker than the non-Latinos (32.1% among Latino volunteers compared to 36.7% among non-Latinos). Being asked to volunteer is a very important pathway to this form of civic engagement, particularly for those who may be relatively new to a community.

## Group Participation

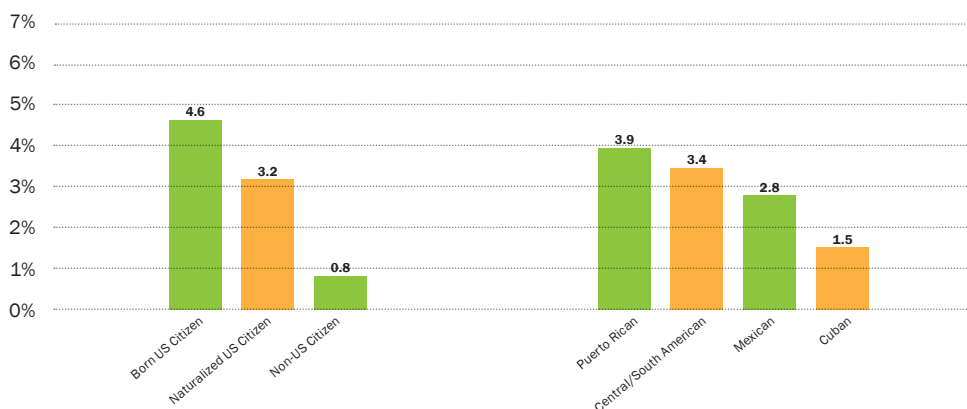
Given the levels of trust in neighbors, connection with their neighborhood, and confidence in public schools, how likely are Latinos to participate in a school group, neighborhood, or community association? While this type of civic engagement is fairly low among both Latinos and non-Latinos, it is in the single digits for Latinos. CPS data shows that only 9.1% of Latinos say they participate in such a group or association, while 14.8% of non-Latinos engage in this manner. Differences in levels of participation are evident among Latino subgroups. Puerto Ricans (10.7%) have the highest rate of participation in a school group, neighborhood, or community association, followed by Mexicans (8.8%), Central/South Americans (8.1%), and Cubans (7.4%).

Like the broader US population, many Latinos do not become members or officers of a group. For Latinos, differences can be seen based on citizenship status and country of origin. Latino citizens, both US-born and naturalized, are much more likely than non-citizens to become a member or an officer of a group. In fact among Latino non-citizens, this form of participation is almost non-existent (0.8%). Among Latino subgroups, Puerto Ricans (3.9%) are most likely to take leadership roles in organizations. Surprisingly, Cubans are half as likely to take on leadership positions (1.5%), the least of any subgroup. Chart 12 below illustrates differences in Latino leadership activity by citizenship status and subgroup designation.

# 37.5%

of Latinos who volunteer do so because they were asked to serve.

**Chart 12. Leadership in a Group/Organization by Citizenship Status and Subgroups**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

## CASE STUDY 2

### **SOCIEDAD LATINA-BOSTON (MISSION HILL NEIGHBORHOOD), MASSACHUSETTS LATINO YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM**

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Sociedad Latina is a Latino youth and family-focused organization located in the Mission Hill neighborhood of Boston. The nonprofit, founded in the 1960s, works toward positive cultural identity and offers programming in music and arts, education, college access, workforce development, health, and civic engagement to the local community.

Once a highly diverse, majority-immigrant neighborhood, the Mission Hill area has become significantly more gentrified.<sup>i</sup> This has challenged the stability and affordability for many current residents, many of whom are immigrants with limited income, education, and English language proficiency. Immigrant parents within this neighborhood express a strong desire for their children to succeed and to participate in their community but, lacking the English language skills and a working knowledge of how to navigate school systems and public institutions, are quickly overwhelmed. Jonathan Rodrigues, Coordinator for Sociedad Latina's Civic Engagement program, believes that structures have to be built to proactively reach out to the resident to help them understand the channels of power. This goes beyond just voting, and includes how to effectively contact representatives and participate in community committee hearings.

The Civic Engagement program is one such structure, offering an opportunity for high school students to learn about civics and government; local governance issues and legislative channels; and, how to build campaigns. Students in the program are encouraged to develop campaigns about issues that are important to them, like education and English language learning. The program is structured as a job. Students are paid by the hour so they develop valuable workforce skills and learn to be effective citizens.

Students in the program gain a working knowledge of the power channels and public institutions that govern their community. They develop campaigns and advocacy strategies for cultural awareness, English language learning, and education policy. Students attend public meetings, testify at hearings, and meet with representatives to voice their concerns. They will even take charge of nonpartisan voter outreach initiatives, knocking on doors in housing developments to encourage residents to register and vote.

These efforts have increased youth confidence in their ability to affect change. In 2014, Laura, an English language learner and recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, was quoted in a newspaper when she testified on cultural proficiency during a mayoral transition hearing.<sup>ii</sup> Seeing her quote in a major publication gave her greater confidence to continue working on public issues. She is now interning with a Massachusetts state representative and plans to be a lawyer.

Laura also recruited her cousin to join Sociedad Latina, who then encouraged other family members to join. Jonathan sees this domino effect frequently amongst Latino families. Students quickly learn that civic participation is something that extends beyond their personal involvement, and that they represent their communities and the larger Latino population. When kids get involved and feel empowered, they often encourage their parents to get involved. Most of Sociedad Latina's outreach is done by word of mouth, and clusters of families will join as smaller social circles aggregate into a larger network of effective citizens.

#### **Highlight: Sociedad Latina's Civic Engagement outcomes in Boston:<sup>iii</sup>**

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- 84% of youth reported an increased connection to their community.
- More than 1,000 children, youth, and adults reported increased knowledge of healthy nutrition and fitness options available to them in their own neighborhood.
- In 2014, as a result of youth community organizing campaigns:
  - The Mayor appointed Sociedad Latina youth to the Boston Redevelopment Authority Impact Advisory Group to provide feedback on Northeastern's Institutional Master Plan.
  - Youth voice was incorporated into citywide conversations around the impact of institutional expansion.
  - Cultural Proficiency was included in Boston Public Schools' Wellness Policy.

<sup>i</sup> Within the Boston Public School system, more than 44% of students do not use English as a primary language, and another 30% are not proficient in English. More than 60% of the students served by Sociedad Latina are Latino, and primarily of recent Puerto-Rican and Dominican descent.

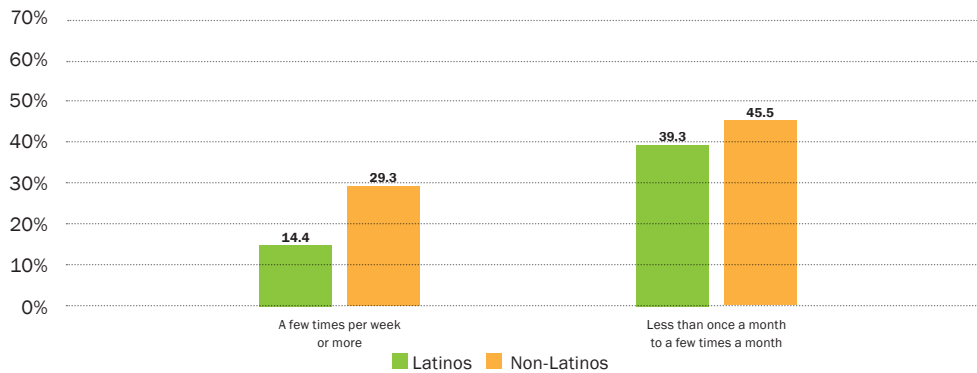
<sup>ii</sup> Johnson, Akilah, The Boston Globe. "Hundreds Turn Out to Meet Walsh Team". Dec 14 2013. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2013/12/14/hundreds-turn-out-for-town-hall-meetings-convened-mayor-elect-martin-walsh/fzuTE2fG9ScLWihWuR1LKM/story.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Sociedad Latina Annual report 2014

## Discussing Politics with Family & Friends

Political discussions with family and friends are a common form of civic participation. Latinos and non-Latinos differ in how much they discuss politics with these personal networks. The Civic Engagement Supplement shows that Latinos are less than half as likely (14.4%) than non-Latinos (29.3%) to talk politics a few times a week or more with friends or family members. Additionally, both Latinos (39.3%) and non-Latinos (45.5%) have disparate rates of discussing politics with friends and family members infrequently (less than once a month to a few times a month). Among Latino respondents who talk politics with their friends and family members a few times a week or more, Cubans are the most engaged (18.3%), followed by Puerto Ricans (14.2%), Central and South Americans (14.0%), and Mexicans (13.6%).

**Chart 13. Frequently Discuss Politics with Family & Friends (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Civic Engagement Supplement

Political dialogue and other forms of discussion with one's personal networks have traditionally occurred around the dinner table. Eating dinner with family is used as an example of social connectedness, and thus an important measure of overall civic health. Even in a time with technology distractions and long workdays, most Latinos and non-Latinos still frequently eat dinner with their family or other household members. More than eight in ten Latinos (86.5%) say they eat dinner with other household members a few times a week or more. In comparison, 88.1% of non-Latinos sit down to the dinner table with family at a similar frequency.

For each Latino subgroup (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Central/South Americans) over 80% of members eat dinner with family a few times a week or more. Cubans are on the relative low end of this activity at 84.6% and Central/South Americans are on the high end at 87.5%. These numbers indicate that like other Americans, Latinos highly value this form of engagement even if they may not be discussing politics very frequently.

**87.5%**  
of Central/South Americans eat dinner with family and friends frequently, the highest of any Latino ethnicity.



## Confidence in Public Schools & Corporations

Latinos and non-Latinos have similar, high levels of trust in public schools. Among Latinos, 83.1% have some or a great deal of confidence in public schools, compared to 84.8% of non-Latinos. This congruence is not just observed across Latino status, but also among Latino subgroups. Over 80% of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Central/South Americans express high levels of trust in public schools, with Cubans tallying the highest levels of confidence at 90.9%.

Latinos are somewhat less trusting of corporations. 56.0% have some or great deal of confidence compared to 65.9% of non-Latinos.



**83.1%**

of Latinos have some or a great deal of confidence in public schools.

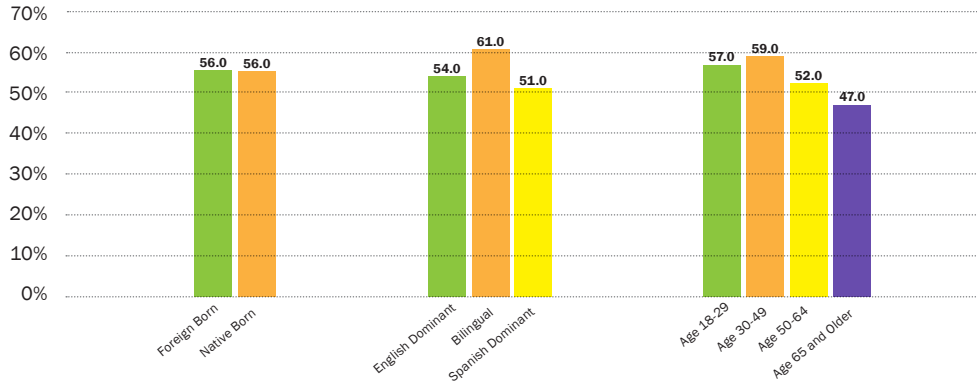
## Confidence in Media & Radio Use

Latinos have a moderate degree of confidence in the media. A little over half of Latinos (55.1%) have some or a great deal of confidence in the media. This is very similar to non-Latinos (55.0%). When Latinos are dissected by subgroup, some differences in media confidence are observed. More than half of Cubans (60.3%) and Central/South Americans (58.9%) express at least some confidence in the media. This level of confidence is lower for Mexicans (54.8%) and Puerto Ricans (46.7%).

Radio listenership is an important and infrequently discussed medium for Latino participation. According to the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC), radio listenership among Latinos is larger than for any other ethnic group in the country, with about 95% of Latinos tuning in every week. Additionally, the Latino radio audience continues to grow across the country. Over the past year, Latino radio consumption increased by more than half a million listeners.<sup>16</sup> This creates a real opportunity for regional and state organizations to leverage this medium and improve Latino civic health.

The conventional perception is that radio consumers are older. Yet, younger Latinos also consume radio at high rates. Of Latinos age 18 to 29, 57% are likely to get their news from radio. Similarly, 59% of Latinos age 30 to 49 are also likely to receive the news through this medium. In comparison, less than half (47%) of Latinos 65 or older tune into the radio for news. In a given week, more than half of all Latinos (56%) state that they get their news from radio. Chart 14 illustrates that radio is a news source for Latinos regardless of differing characteristics—age, language preference, and nativity.

### Chart 14. Radio News Consumption Among Latinos



Source: Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/07/23/ii-demographics-and-language-of-news-media-consumption/>

The National Hispanic Media Coalition notes that “Latino stations” (radio stations owned by, operated by, or serving Latinos) significantly contribute to the viewpoint diversity of their listeners. They also tailor their programming to meet Latino needs. As NHMC notes, Latino radio stations are required to be a “one-stop shop” for an audience that is not only diverse, but has a limited number of outlets to choose from.

Perhaps most significant for Latino civic engagement is the role that Latino radio stations played in facilitating the 2006 immigration rallies that took place across the country, during which an estimated 4 million Latinos in over 160 cities participated. As one listener explained:

*“It was very helpful to talk to them about this, they understood the problems of the community, they were very collaborative ... every radio deejay was talking about this big thing that was going to happen.”*

NHMC noted that organizers agreed that the efforts of Spanish-language radio were crucial to increasing such a large turnout.



## CASE STUDY 3

### BROWNZERO LA RADIO PODCAST

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Started in 2013, BrownZero LA is a socially conscious podcast radio show hosted by KillRadio.org. The show's founder, professor of sociology Dr. Jesse Diaz Jr., began the show to address the gap in online radio programs geared towards Latino culture and issues. Though he lacked a background in communications or radio technology, he was an experienced political activist and wanted to create a public platform for local Latinos to discuss social policy issues and events.

The radio show offered a perfect opportunity for his former student, Brenda Tafoya, to get involved in her community. With a full-time job and family to support, Brenda had been in search of an outlet to share her opinions and engage with her neighbors. The weekly radio show provided the optimal platform for Brenda to interview friends, family members, policy makers, activists, residents in the neighborhood and nearby communities, and academics about social issues.

Since 2013 BrownZero LA has hosted shows on a variety of local, national, and global issues. A local college student came on the show to discuss lactation rights. Brenda's elementary school-age daughter did a report on the documentary *Blackfish*. UC Riverside students came in to discuss the gentrification and housing prices in East LA. Mothers of children who were killed by police came in to discuss their experience with the criminal justice system. DREAMers\* talked about their experience trying to get an education in the US higher-education system. Parents, priests, and organizers of the effort to send their kids unsupervised across the border from Central America came on the show to discuss their actions and rationale.

Brenda notes that, as an amateur radio show hosted by a nonprofit, BrownZero LA is accessible. Latinos and community members can feel comfortable participating in a show to discuss these hot-button issues because it's not a formal news outlet or institution that could be intimidating. The show creates a loose and informal atmosphere - the equipment malfunctions, background noise can be heard, and speakers flow easily between Spanish and English. This casual setting makes it easier for Brenda and Jesse to bring in people who would not otherwise be brought out on mainstream media. Callers and guests of all viewpoints and opinions are welcomed and encouraged to participate.

Tafoya also noted that informal platforms like these play a key role in Latino civic involvement. Although many residents will show up at community meetings to address immediate issues of gentrification and displacement, many other community members are distrustful of formal systems and choose to be civically active in alternative ways. Active citizens will coordinate mural series, share policy information at local performances, and talk about social justice issues at social gatherings. Individuals are more likely to be identified by which Facebook pages and postings they follow, their local social issue forum subscriptions, and which cultural events they attend, rather than by their voting records.

Tafoya likes to think that BrownZero LA is contributing to that culture of alternative activism and informal knowledge sharing. The online format makes it highly accessible to listeners, and the independent, nonprofit natures of KillRadio grants considerable freedom of speech. She believes the show provides an important platform to share music, conversation, and dialogue about issues important to Latino residents.

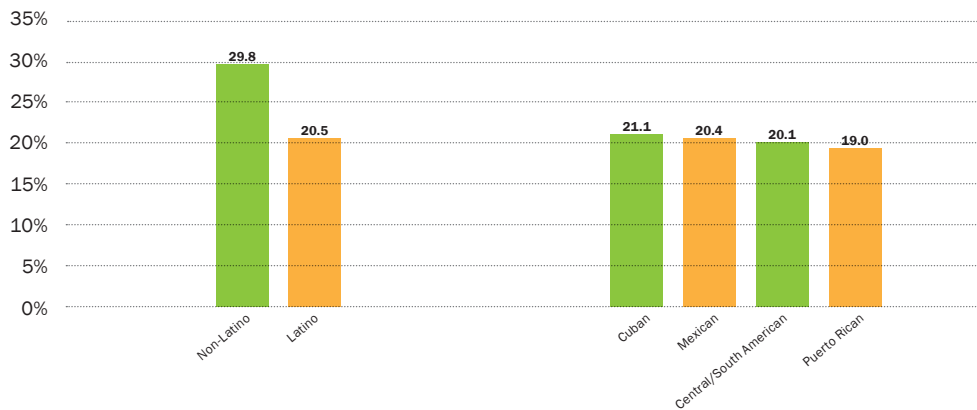
\*DREAMer refers to undocumented youth who meet the general requirements of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act.

## INTERNET USE

Beyond traditional media, an important vehicle for civic engagement is the Internet. Some scholars and observers lament the erosion of traditional civic life due in part to technological advances like the Internet. However, others see technology as a useful mechanism for civic growth.<sup>17</sup> A recent Pew survey found that 39% of adults use the Internet to engage in some form of political activity.<sup>18</sup> The Census Bureau's Civic Engagement Supplement finds that 20.5% of Latinos use the Internet to express public opinion. Comparatively, 29.8% of non-Latinos do so.

There is little variation among Latino subgroups in leveraging the Internet to express a public opinion. Puerto Ricans are least likely to take this action (19%) and Cubans the most likely (21.1%). Overall, about one in five Latinos, from every subgroup, use the Internet to express public opinion.

**Chart 15. Internet Use by Ethnicity and Latino Subgroup**



Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/20/hispanics-to-benefit-from-obamas-community-college-plan/>

**20.5%**

of Latinos use the Internet to express public opinion.

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE LATINO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

To affect levels of Latino civic engagement, it is important to understand the obstacles that hinder Latino civic participation. Social and demographic measures such as income, education, age, and hours worked are considered important determinants of civic engagement. Since Latinos are generally less engaged in many civic activities, measures specific to Latinos (Latino origin, citizenship status, and language use) are examined in this section.

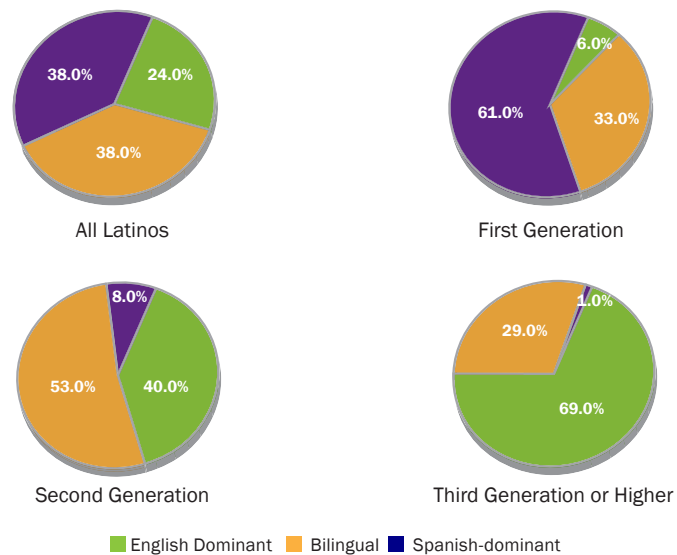
Regardless of other factors, the more educated an individual is, the more likely he or she is to be civically active. In addition, higher age and income are positive factors. However, for Latinos, other characteristics such as citizenship status, English language proficiency, and home ownership all have a positive effect.

## Language

The inability to speak the primary language of the country of residence can be an obstacle to civic engagement. According to a Pew Hispanic Center Study, Latino immigrants are most likely to be proficient in Spanish, but least likely to be able to speak English. English ability and use, however, become more prevalent in later generations. Chart 16 illustrates this trend. Among all Latinos, there is a split between those who are Spanish-dominant and bilingual (38%), and those who are English dominant (24%).

Once language proficiency is broken down by generation, the numbers are remarkably varied. First generation Latinos are almost twice as likely to be Spanish-dominant as bilingual (61% to 33%), and ten times more likely to be Spanish-dominant than English-dominant (6%). The numbers for later generation Latinos look much different. Second generation Latinos are most likely to be bilingual (53%), and third generation Latinos are most likely English-dominant.<sup>19</sup>

**Chart 16. Latino Generational Differences in Language Use**



Source: Pew Hispanic Study, 2012. "When Labels Don't Fit: Hispanics and Their Views of Identity"

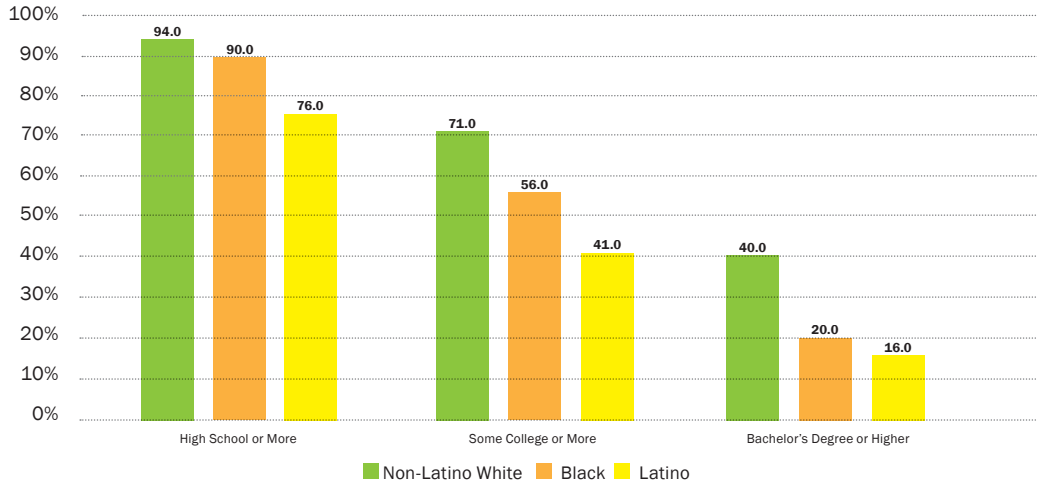
Latino immigrants lag behind later generations in their use of the English language and ability to speak it. This may serve as an impediment to broader civic engagement beyond the confines of small, Latino-only communities. The ability to speak English provides access to civic engagement opportunities like voting, group membership, group leadership positions, and volunteering.

## Education

Education plays a key role in civic engagement and democracy. Regardless of ethnicity, those who are more educated are more likely to participate in civic and social activities. A number of factors tied to education contribute to this assumption. Education generally leads to better economic status. This, in turn, facilitates interest and ability to be civically active. Those with less education tend to be more economically constrained, making civic engagement more challenging.

An examination of educational attainment for adults age 25 to 29 shows that Latinos have the lowest educational attainment levels of any group in the US. As we can see from Chart 17, Latinos lag behind in educational achievement—from high school to college in comparison to other groups. In fact, only 16% of Latinos obtain a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>20</sup>

**Chart 17. Educational Attainment by Race and Latino Origin (Adults Age 25 to 29)**



Source: Child trends data bank. [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)

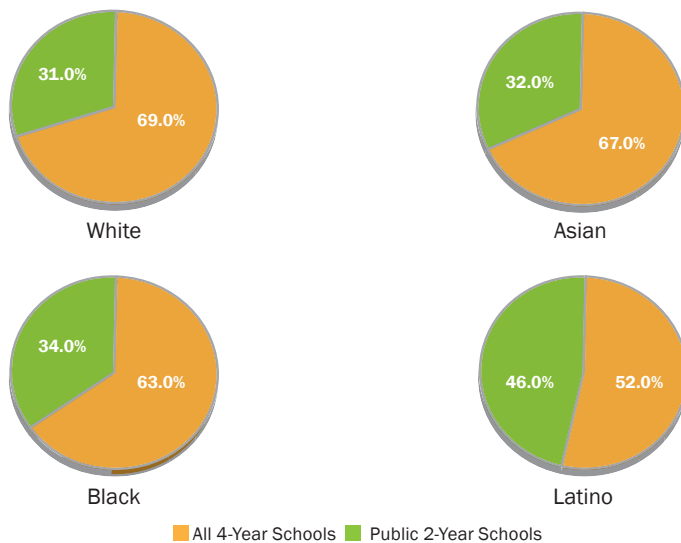
Reducing the high school dropout rate remains a major factor affecting Latino educational achievement. The high school dropout rate is 14% for Latinos, compared to 8% for Blacks, and 4% for non-Latino Whites.<sup>21</sup> Improving Latino educational attainment would also increase civic engagement.

The future for Latino education looks promising. The number of Latino high school graduates is steadily improving. In 1993 the Latino dropout rate was 33%. Today, that number is 14%. Overall national high school dropout rates are significantly lower than in the past, due in large part to increases in Latino graduation rates.

More Latinos are also enrolled in college than ever before. According to the Census Bureau, the number of Latino students enrolled in college has steadily increased since 2009. Community college in particular may provide a viable access point for increasing Latino educational attainment. According to a recent Pew Survey, almost 46% of Latinos enrolled in college attend a public two-year school. The graph below shows that as Latinos comprise the highest rate of enrollment in two-year public schools for any racial or ethnic group, the rate of enrollment at four-year schools is the lowest of all groups.<sup>22</sup>

Latinos also make up 22% of all community college students; an increase of 9 percentage points since 2000.<sup>23</sup>

**Chart 18. College Enrollment in 2-Year and 4-Year Schools by Race/Ethnicity**

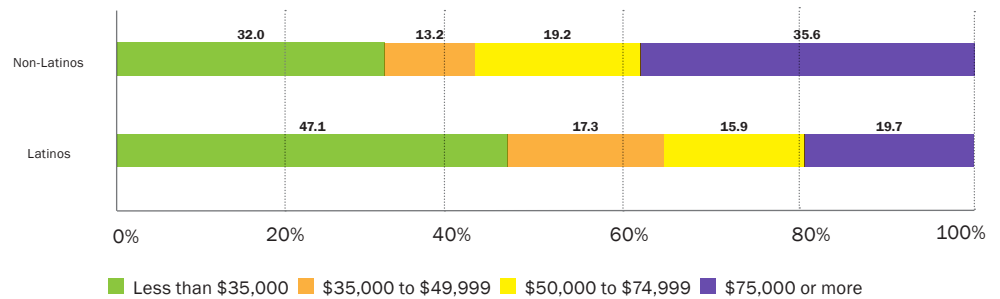


\*Pew numbers were calculated based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics. Due to rounding or other small differences in calculation the numbers may not be exact.

## Income & Wages

Wages are also an important component of Latino civic health. Like education, wages are tied to a number of correlated measures such as language ability and citizenship status. A likely obstacle to Latino civic engagement is the fact that Latinos on average earn significantly less than non-Latinos. Recent Census data shows that almost half (47.1%) of Latino households earn less than \$35,000, compared to just 32.0% of non-Latino households. On the other side of the spectrum, 35.6% of non-Latino households earn \$75,000 or more, compared to 19.7% of Latino households (see Chart 19).

**Chart 19. Household Income Category (Latinos vs. Non-Latinos)**



Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 Current Population Survey

Estimates show that an average Latino household earns slightly below \$50,000, while an average non-Latino household earns a little over \$65,000.

Economic challenges for Latinos also comes in the form of lower hourly wages, compared to non-Latinos. Latinos earn about \$13.00 an hour compared to non-Latino whites who earn about \$20.00 an hour.<sup>24</sup> In addition to lower wages, Latinos also have a higher unemployment rate (6.6%), compared to the national average of 5.3%.<sup>25</sup>

## Citizenship Status

Naturalized Latinos make up 17.3% of the Latino population. This compares to 30.1% of Latinos who are non-naturalized immigrants. When studying this group, it is unclear whether gaining citizenship status broadly increases civic participation. Only when combining citizenship status with other factors such as English language proficiency does a clear positive correlation appear. For example, eight in ten Latinos who are citizens and registered to vote primarily speak English. In contrast, only about two in ten Spanish dominant Latino citizens are registered to vote.<sup>26</sup>

It is clear, however, that real barriers to gaining citizenship exist for Latinos. Almost a third of non-naturalized Latino immigrants (30%) cite language or other personal constraints as the main factors preventing them from gaining citizenship. Nearly another third of Latino immigrants (30%) state that they are not interested or have not attempted to naturalize. A full 21% cite financial hardship as a significant hurdle to naturalization.<sup>27</sup>



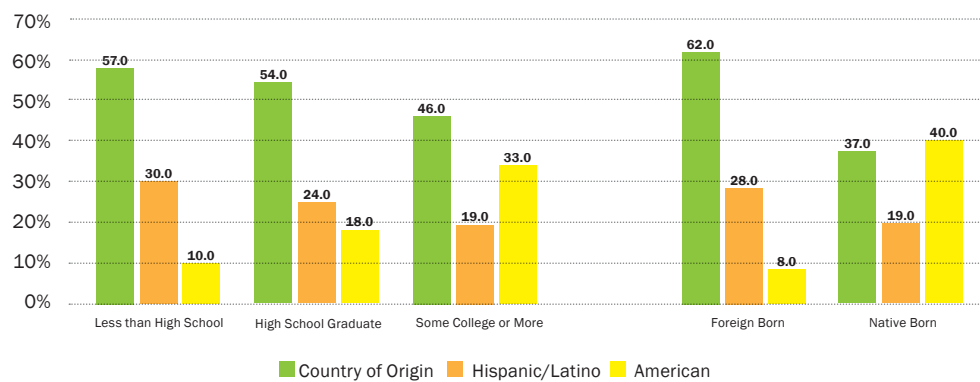
## “Latino” Label

The “Latino” designation is not universally embraced. The term is a socially constructed label created through a law passed by the US Congress in 1976. The law required that federal government agencies collect information about US residents of Spanish origin or descent. Under directives from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), individuals from Spanish-speaking country origins are the only group that can self-classify by ethnicity (Hispanic or Latino).<sup>28</sup> All other groups (e.g., Whites, Black, Asian Americans) are classified by race.

Only 29% of Latinos believe that Latinos in the US share a common culture. 69% say that Latinos in the US share many different cultures.<sup>29</sup> Of course, how Latinos describe themselves is influenced by a number of factors such as education and foreign-or native-born status. Chart 20 shows a clear linear relationship of higher levels of education and nativity on Latinos identifying as American rather than a different designation.

Across most measures (except for native-born); Latinos are more likely to identify themselves by country of origin than by any other label. For example, over half of Latinos (51%) prefer to be identified by their country of origin, while less than a quarter (24%) identify themselves with a pan-ethnic label (“Hispanic” or “Latino”).<sup>30</sup>

**Chart 20. How Latinos Most Often Identify**



Source: Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/04/ii-identity-pan-ethnicity-and-race/>

Latinos’ designation choice is also influenced by language use and generation status. 48% of Latinos who are English dominant prefer to be called American. This compares to 30% who are Spanish dominant. 48% of those third generation or higher see themselves as American, compared 34% of those who are second generation.<sup>31</sup>

Foreign-born, Spanish-dominant, and Latinos from earlier generations are less apt to use the American label.

**51%**  
of Latinos prefer to be identified by their country of origin.

\* The study used for this discussion (conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012) was based upon responses to the forced-choice question of “Which term do you use to describe yourself most often?” Possible responses were country of origin, Hispanic/Latino, and American

## LOOKING FORWARD: *The Future of Latino Civic Health*

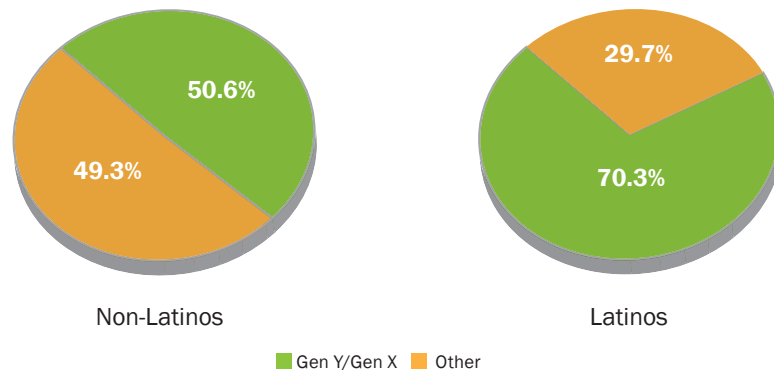
The Latino population's characteristics, along with identifiable institutional barriers help provide a clearer picture of the current state of Latino civic health. However, Latinos are far from being a stagnant community. Rather, they are the most rapidly changing demographic group in the country. The changes taking place, coupled with new opportunities for participation, will help define (or redefine) the prospects for greater Latino civic engagement. Some of these changes and opportunities are discussed below.

### The Sleeping Giant is Awakening

Latinos are spearheading the demographic shift in America. They are the largest and fastest growing group in the US. Over the past four decades, the size of the Latino population in the US has gone from 4.7% in 1970 to 17.1% in 2014. Latinos are projected to double in population by 2050, growing to 109 million.<sup>32</sup>

As Chart 21 shows, 70.3% of the Latino population is comprised of members from Generation X (those born from 1965 to 1980) and Millennial (those born in 1981 or later) cohorts. In comparison, Generation X and Millennial members make up 50.6% of the non-Latino population. The age distribution of Latinos and non-Latinos are strikingly different. Among the Latino population, 37.9% are in the Millennial generation, compared to 25.9% among non-Latinos. Among Latinos living in the United States, seven in ten are under 50, while just five in ten of non-Latinos fall in this age category.

**Chart 21. Latinos are Younger than the Rest of the Population**



Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 Current Population Survey

A large part of the rise in Latino youth is due to overall Latino population increases in native-born Latinos. Native-born Latinos make up 48.4% of the Latino population. Further, over 93% of Latinos age 18 and under are citizens of the US.<sup>33</sup> Each month, more than 73,000 Latinos turn 18.

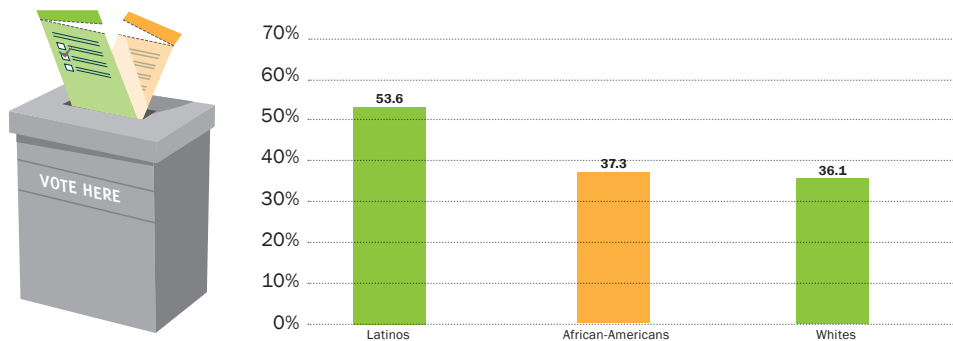
## Latino Youth: Hope for Greater Civic Engagement?<sup>34</sup>

Between 2004 and 2008, the turnout of eligible Latino voters aged 18-24 increased from 33% to 39%, and in 2008, one in seven Latino voters was in that age group. Latino youth represent a major part of the nation's future population and its electorate. By the 2012 election, approximately 2.4 million more US-born Latinos were over 18 years old than in the 2008 election. An estimated 800,000 Latinos turn 18 each year, a figure that will increase in the coming decades. This growth alone could add an additional 16 million voters by 2030.<sup>35</sup>

Traditionally, younger people tend to lag behind older cohorts on many measures of civic engagement. For example, both non-Latino and Latino Millennials, those born after 1981, typically vote at rates 10-20 percentage points lower, respectively, than other cohorts. However, in 2008, Latino youth, ages 18-24 voted at the highest rate for their age group (30%) since 1972.<sup>36</sup>

Electoral participation was generally lower in 2012 than in 2008. This was true for Latino youth who voted at a rate of 36.9% that year. Though this was lower than 2008, voting in 2012 was a 7.5% increase since 2000. While Latino youth voting rates lag behind those of White and Black youth, the overall increase from 2000-2012 is promising. The majority of the Latino population is concentrated in the younger age range. In 2012, 53.6% of young Latino voters cast their vote for the very first time. Comparatively, in 2012, 36.1% of White youth and 37.3% of Black youth were first time voters.<sup>37</sup>

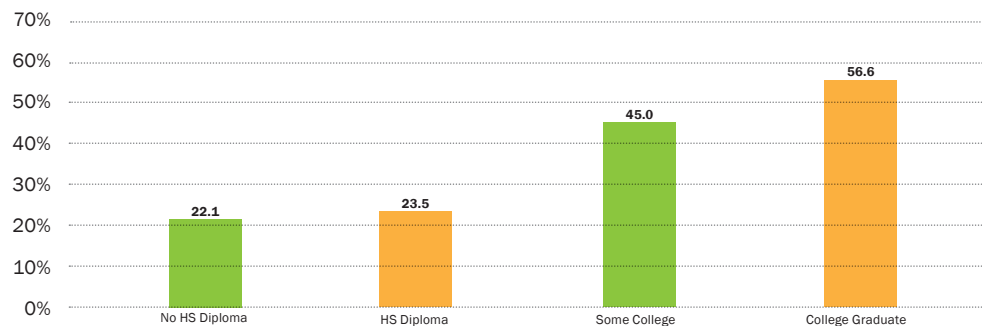
**Chart 22. Youth Who Voted for the First Time in the 2012 Presidential Election**



Source: Peter Levine. 2012. The Commission on Civic Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge Youth Post-Election Survey

As with all youth (and all voters), voter turnout levels for young Latinos are significantly impacted by education. Chart 23 illustrates gaps in voting among Latino youth (ages 18-24) based on educational attainment, as evidenced by the 2012 CPS Voting Supplement.

**Chart 23. Latino Youth Voter Turnout by Educational Attainment**

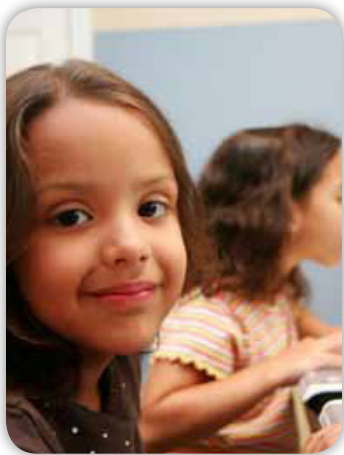


Source: US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2012 Voting Supplement

A stark voter turnout gap exists between Latinos with and without a high school diploma. Latino youth with a high school diploma vote at 2.5 times the rate of those without. Higher levels of education also make a difference. Six in ten Latino youth with some college education turn out to vote, compared to four in ten Latino youth with only a high school diploma.<sup>38</sup>

In the 2012 election, Latino youth also demonstrated increased levels of participation in other types of political activities. According to a 2012 study by John Rogowski, Claudia Sandoval, and Cathy Cohen, almost 10% of Latino youth displayed a political sign, bumper sticker, or button, 7.7% of Latino youth made a political contribution, and 7.1% contacted a public official.<sup>39</sup> These political participation rates for Latinos are comparable to those of young Whites. The numbers indicate the young Latinos were politically active in the last presidential election and points to positive signs for future political engagement.

Millennials (both Latino and non-Latino) lag behind on some non-political forms of civic engagement like talking with neighbors, helping neighbors, and participation in civic associations. However on other measures, both Latino and non-Latino Millennials engage at similar or higher rates than non-Millennials.



First, Millennials tend to have high trust in both public schools and in corporations. CPS data shows that more than eight in ten Latino and non-Latino Millennials say they have some or a great deal of confidence in public schools. For Latino Millennials, this number is higher than for any other Latino cohort. In comparison, Non-Latino Millennials lag behind non-Latino Generation Xers, but only slightly (85.1% to 86.9%).

When it comes to trust in corporations, two-thirds of non-Latino Millennials say they have some or a great deal of confidence in these entities, while 57% of Latino Millennials express a similar sentiment. While non-Latino Millennials trail non-Latino Gen Xers in this level of trust, Latino Millennials are the most trusting of corporations. This level of trust is shared by the Silent Generation (those born between 1931 and 1945).

One important and potentially distinguishing measure of civic engagement for Latinos is the use of the Internet. While Latino overall Internet usage (measured as use of the Internet at least occasionally or send/receive emails at least occasionally) still lags behind non-Latino Whites (78% to 87%), the gap has significantly closed since 2009 when the difference was sixteen percentage points.<sup>40</sup> Increased technology use among Latinos has in part been driven by foreign-born and Spanish language dominant Latinos. This is important because technology use can help mollify barriers to participation and engagement that are more prevalent among this segment of the Latino community.

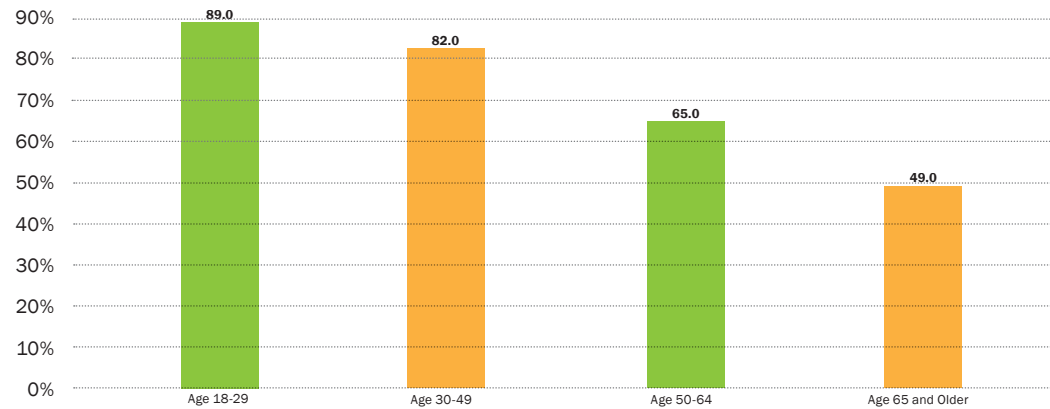
Technology adoption, though, is mainly a young person phenomenon, and this is no different for Latinos. Nearly all Latinos age 18-29 (93%) say they use the Internet at least occasionally, while only a third (33%) of those age 65 or older do the same.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the Internet has been an increasingly meaningful tool for political engagement among Millennials.

According to the Current Population Survey, both Latino and non-Latino Millennials are more likely than other cohorts to express public opinion through social media. Almost a quarter of Latino Millennials (24.2%) and a third of non-Latino Millennials (32.9%) say they use the Internet to express public opinion at any frequency. Comparatively, 31% of non-Latino Gen Xers and 18.9% of Latino Gen Xers use the Internet to express public opinion. A 2013 report from the Pew Research Center found that Latino Millennials also use the Internet to engage in other forms of political activities. For example, 13.4% of Latinos used the Internet to sign up for campaign emails from candidates, 26% of Latino youth viewed campaign material online, and 11.8% circulated political material online.<sup>42</sup> These rates of Internet political activities among Latino Millennials are comparable to rates for Millennial Whites.

## Latino Youth & Social Media

Beyond just Internet usage, the potential for civic engagement for Latino youth may revolve more around social media. In a time of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, using social media as a tool for engagement and participation is easier than ever. The illustration below on social networking use reveals that almost nine in ten Millennials who use the Internet are also likely to engage with social media. The rate for Millennials is 7 percentage points higher than Gen Xers, and 23 points more than Baby Boomers.<sup>43</sup>

**Chart 24. Use of Social Networking Sites by Age**



Source: Pew Research Center. 2014. "Social Networking Fact Sheet."

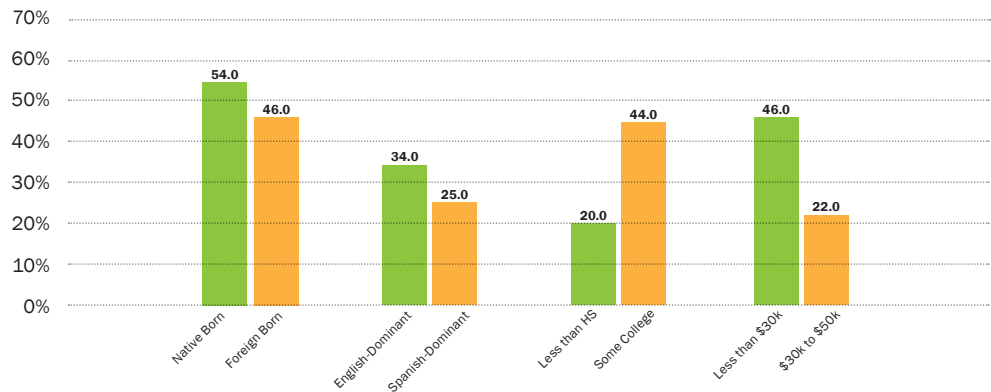
As the above figure shows, Millennials, in particular, are strongly connected by social media and this leads to greater political engagement. According to the Harvard Public Opinion Poll (HPOP) of young people, Millennial participation with and in social media is strongly related to higher levels of political engagement, specifically, greater rates of voter registration and voter turnout. The HPOP shows that 73% of Millennials with three or more social media accounts were registered to vote, compared to 50% of those with no social media accounts. Also, only a third of Millennials (33%) with three or more social media accounts failed to vote in the 2012 elections, while 42% of those with no social media accounts decided not to vote.<sup>44</sup>

Latino Millennials are not far behind non-Latino Millennials in social media use. More than eight in ten Latinos (84%), age 18-29 who use the Internet also utilize social media. And overall, Latino Internet users access social networking sites at higher rates (80%) than non-Latino Whites (70%) and Blacks (75%).<sup>45</sup> It is a good sign for Latinos and in particular for their largely young demographic, that this group is at the forefront of this emerging form of civic engagement.

As with other forms of civic engagement, use of social media differs across Latino subgroups that use the Internet. Native-born Latinos who use the Internet are more likely to use social media than foreign-born Latino Internet users. Seven in ten Latinos born in the US (73%) say they use social media, compared to six in ten Latinos not born in the US (63%). Latinos who use English as their primary language (76%) are also more likely to engage in social media use than bilingual Latinos (67%) or Spanish-dominant Latinos (61%). The powerful role of education for Latino civic engagement is also seen in social media use. About half of Latinos who did not finish high school (54%) use social media, compared to almost three-fourths of those with a high school diploma (73%) and those with some college experience (73%).<sup>46</sup>

Latino social network users have a fairly discernable identity. They are more likely to have been born in the US, they are English-dominant rather than Spanish-dominant, and they are likely to have some college experience. The one characteristic that is atypical to this form of engagement is that lower income Latinos (who use the Internet) are more likely than higher income Latinos to be engaged in social media. Over 40% of Latinos earning less than \$30,000 a year use social media. By contrast only 20% of Latinos who make \$30,000 to \$40,000 and 27% of those earning \$50,000 or more use social media.<sup>47</sup> See Chart 25 on the next page.

**Chart 25. Characteristics of Latino Social Media Users**



Source: Pew Research Center. 2013. "72% of Online Adults are Social Networking Site Users."

The fact that lower income Latinos currently engage with social media at higher rates could be a real opportunity to reach more Latinos via this medium. As previously discussed, Latinos tend to earn less money than non-Latinos. Lack of income is consistently tied to lower levels of civic engagement. However, social media may be able to transcend income levels, at least to some extent.

Further emphasizing this opportunity is the increasing portability of social media. More and more Americans are using smartphones, and Latinos actually own smartphones at a slightly higher rate than non-Latino Whites (49% to 46%).<sup>48</sup> Smartphones facilitate the use of social media and make this type of interaction more instantaneous than ever. Latinos have embraced this activity and medium more than other groups. Almost half of Latinos (49%) who own smartphones use social networking sites on their mobile device. Comparatively, 48% of Blacks and 36% of non-Latino Whites use social network sites on their mobile device.<sup>49</sup>

The increasing use of the Internet, mobile devices, and social media among Latinos opens new opportunities for civic engagement that were previously less available to this community. In particular, researchers argue that social media can become a main vehicle for targeting the Latino vote since more conventional methods have historically been less successful.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, social networking is not just limited to political discussions, and, in fact, may stimulate other forms of political and social participation.

A recent Pew study notes that it is often assumed that those who engage in political discussion on social networking sites are distinct from those who take part in other forms of activity. However, this is not the case. For example 63% of social network users have been involved in some form of political activity like attending a political meeting or working with others to solve community problems. This rate is higher than the national average of 48% for these types of participation. Another 53% of social media users are likely to send letters to government officials or sign petitions, compared to the national average of 39%. Overall, 83% of social network site users get involved in other forms of political social participation. Social network use does indeed appear to be a catalyst for civic engagement. Given that Latinos make up the largest demographic of social media users, it is a positive sign and a potential road map for how national, regional, and state entities can more efficiently engage the Latino community.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH

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A cleaner bill of civic health for Latinos looks more promising than ever. Latinos are the largest and fastest growing group in the US. This alone produces a more positive outlook. Beyond sheer numbers, several important characteristics are helping Latinos mitigate obstacles to participation. In particular, more Latinos are now native-born than foreign-born, a larger percentage of Latinos are likely to speak English or be bilingual, and Latinos are becoming more educated.

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The large share of young Latinos as a percentage of the overall Latino population is also an important phenomenon for improving levels of civic engagement. About 73,000 native-born Latinos turn 18 each month and more of these Latinos are participating in the political process for the first time.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, young Latinos are closing the gap in other forms of engagement. These levels of engagement are, in part, fueled by the technological revolution. The Internet and social media have become a growing medium for civic engagement and one Latinos have embraced in larger numbers than other groups.

As the Latino population expands, American society will in large part be shaped by how well Latinos incorporate into that society. Latinos still face many obstacles that should be addressed by partners, groups, and organizations. However, these entities should not simply focus on traditional forms of engagement, but embrace new opportunities for participation and nontraditional measures of involvement.

We now live in a world where traditional boundaries are less limiting to engagement. Those interested in greater Latino participation should think in these terms. Latinos have an opportunity to redefine civic engagement and potentially be the leading group that shapes society in the future.

### Next Steps for Research

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- **Conduct research focused on state and local Latino communities to better understand regional differences.**
- **Delve further into the civic life of Millennial Latinos to better understand this key demographic.**
- **Explore alternative pathways of civic engagement, such as community college, informal volunteering, and alternative communication channels.**

## ENDNOTES

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- 19 Pew Hispanic Study. 2012. "When Labels Don't Fit: Hispanics and their Views of Identity."
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- 47 Ibid.
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## ABOUT THE DATA

The Latino community represents a critical civic asset for our nation. However, more needs to be done to understand the civic behaviors and experiences of this ever-growing segment of the population. With this report, NCoC is shining a light on the barriers and opportunities for increasing Latino civic engagement.

Our research and analysis of the public datasets on civic engagement have surfaced positive highlights and critical opportunities for Latino civic engagement. That said, no data set is perfect. Issues to keep in mind include:

1. While the questions asked on the Volunteering and Civic Engagement supplement offer the most extensive public information available on civic participation in the United States, they are limited in scope and cultural relativity. This data does not measure components of civic engagement that may be significant to several Latino communities (such as attending religious institutions, providing professional services to families members and friends, or sending remittances).
2. The CPS is conducted via in-person and telephone interviews. The Census Bureau provides interpreter services for participants who may not be fluent in English.
3. The Current Population Survey (CPS) does not include undocumented immigrants, thus this report does not include analysis for their civic behaviors and activities. According to 2014 data, there are an estimated 11.3 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States.<sup>i</sup> In 2012, roughly 81% of the undocumented immigrant population was from Latin American countries.<sup>ii</sup>

The CPS offers a snapshot of civic behaviors that contribute to the fabric of our Democracy. These indicators serve as benchmarks for participation across time and populations, and offer insight into how Latino communities can be better incorporated into civic activities. We acknowledge, however, that the CPS has limitations, some of which are listed above. NCoC supports continuing efforts to capture Latino engagement as comprehensively as possible. The Latino population is the fastest-growing and youngest upcoming demographic in our country. Their civic participation is crucial to the strength of our communities and Democracy. We hope this report raises the need for greater Latino participation, expanded data collection, and additional research.<sup>ii</sup>

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ii. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/23/politico-immigrants-latino\\_n\\_3142061.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/23/politico-immigrants-latino_n_3142061.html)



## A WORD ABOUT NEXT STEPS

This report should be a conversation-starter. The data and ideas presented here raise as many questions as they answer. We encourage government entities, community groups, business people, leaders of all kinds, and individual citizens to treat this report as a first step toward building more robust civic health for Latinos.

## TECHNICAL NOTE

Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this Report are based on CIRCLE's analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any and all errors are our own. Volunteering estimates are from CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2013, voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement 2012, and all other civic engagement indicators, such as discussion of political information and connection to neighbors, come from the 2013 CPS Civic Engagement Supplement. Census asks two questions about people's race and ethnicity. Hispanic background is considered an ethnicity, not race. Therefore, in the data analysis involving the Census data, we included individuals who reported that they consider themselves to be "Hispanic," regardless of the racial group they identified with. In other words, we include in this report a self-identified ethnic group of multiple racial origins. We call this group "Latinos." The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and other survey and academic works. We employ the terms interchangeably in this report, where appropriate for reference purposes.

Using a probability selected sample of about 60,000 occupied households drawn from geographically based sampling units, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the single-year CPS sample sizes for Latinos which were included in this Report were 3,539 for Civic Engagement Supplement, 10,374 in Volunteering Supplement and 7,812 in the Voting Supplement (for the Voting Supplement, the sample includes U.S. citizens only). All of the estimates are weighted by final population weights calculated by the Census Bureau. For all estimates of civic health indicators, we use the specific weights computed for each supplement. These civic engagement weights account for non-response bias.



The Census Current Population Survey administers three different surveys from which civic indicators for this report are drawn. The September Volunteering Supplement includes questions about volunteering (frequency and types of volunteer work), community involvement and charitable contribution and it is administered annually. The civic engagement includes questions about political engagement (e.g., political discussion and voting in local elections), social connection (e.g., favors for neighbors, seeing friends). The Civic Engagement supplement was administered annually between 2008 and 2011 and again in 2013. Statistics about voter participation in national elections come from the Voting and Registration supplement, which is administered in even years. The estimates about voting in national elections are based on citizens.

In accordance with the reporting practice implemented by CNCS, we include people who are 16 and older in calculating estimates from the Volunteering supplement (e.g., volunteering, working with neighbors to fix something and charitable giving) and 18 and older for the Voting and Civic Engagement Supplement (all other Census indicators on civic engagement). When we calculate estimates by subgroups, we generally use the same age cut-off, with an exception of educational attainment, in which case we use age 25.

All surveys, including federal surveys are subject to sampling error. Margin of error is influenced by multiple factors including sample size, estimate size, population size, and other parameters. Therefore, we do not report one margin of error across all indicators. That said, the large sample sizes in this report (3,539 for the smallest supplement) means that the sampling error is quite small, within one to two percentage points. However, any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples and therefore the margin of error will increase.

# CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

## State and Local Partnerships

NCoC began America's Civic Health Index in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, NCoC was incorporated into the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act and directed to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the US Census Bureau.

NCoC now works with partners in more than 30 communities nationwide to use civic data to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America and to drive sustainable civic strategies.

## STATES

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David Mathews Center for Civic Life  
Auburn University

### Arizona

Center for the Future of Arizona

### California

California Forward  
Center for Civic Education  
Center for Individual and Institutional Renewal  
Davenport Institute

### Colorado

Metropolitan State University of Denver  
The Civic Canopy  
Denver Metro Chamber Leadership  
Campus Compact of Mountain West  
History Colorado  
Institute on Common Good

### Connecticut

Everyday Democracy  
Secretary of the State of Connecticut

### District of Columbia

ServeDC

### Florida

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship  
Bob Graham Center for Public Service  
Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government

### Georgia

GeorgiaForward  
Carl Vinson Institute of Government,  
The University of Georgia  
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

### Illinois

McCormick Foundation

### Indiana

Center on Congress at Indiana University  
Indiana Bar Foundation  
Indiana Supreme Court  
Indiana University Northwest  
IU Center for Civic Literacy

### Kentucky

Commonwealth of Kentucky,  
Secretary of State's Office  
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility,  
Western Kentucky University  
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education  
McConnell Center, University of Louisville

### Maryland

Mannakee Circle Group  
Center for Civic Education  
Common Cause-Maryland  
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

### Massachusetts

Harvard Institute of Politics

### Michigan

Michigan Nonprofit Association  
Michigan Campus Compact  
Michigan Community Service Commission  
Volunteer Centers of Michigan  
Council of Michigan Foundations

### Minnesota

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

### Missouri

Missouri State University  
Park University  
Saint Louis University  
University of Missouri Kansas City  
University of Missouri Saint Louis  
Washington University

### Nebraska

Nebraskans for Civic Reform

### New Hampshire

Carsey Institute  
Campus Compact of New Hampshire  
University System of New Hampshire  
New Hampshire College & University Council

### New York

Siena College Research Institute  
New York State Commission on National and Community Service

### North Carolina

Institute for Emerging Issues

### Ohio

Miami University Hamilton Center for Civic Engagement

### Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma  
Oklahoma Campus Compact

### Pennsylvania

Center for Democratic Deliberation  
National Constitution Center

### South Carolina

University of South Carolina Upstate

### Texas

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life,  
University of Texas at Austin

### Virginia

Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier  
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

## ISSUE SPECIFIC

### Latinos Civic Health Index

Carnegie Corporation

### Veterans Civic Health Index

Got Your 6

### Millennials Civic Health Index

Mobilize.org  
Harvard Institute of Politics  
CIRCLE

### Economic Health

Knight Foundation  
Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS)  
CIRCLE

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### **Chicago**

McCormick Foundation

### **Kansas City & Saint Louis**

Missouri State University

Park University

Saint Louis University

University of Missouri Kansas City

University of Missouri Saint Louis

Washington University

### **Miami**

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Miami Foundation

### **Pittsburgh**

University of Pittsburgh

Carnegie Mellon University

### **Seattle**

Seattle City Club

Boeing Company

Seattle Foundation

### **Twin Cities**

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Citizens League

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

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