

Texas Report



Latino  **Decisions**

February 2014

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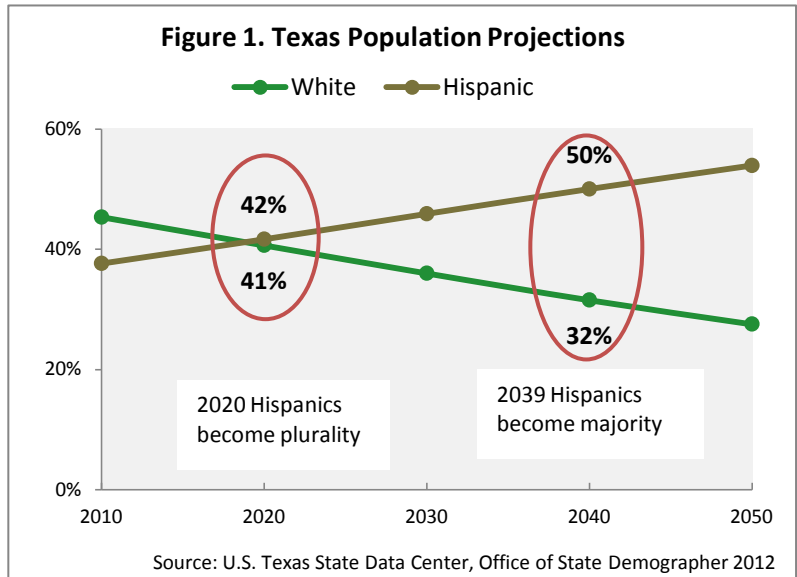
Executive Summary

Texas is a compelling subject for researchers, parties, and others with vested interests in politics because of the burgeoning eligible Hispanic electorate. Virtually all articles and studies written about the future of Texas politics hold Latinos at the centerpiece of the narrative, and rightfully so. Using data from public sources along with Latino Decisions polling in the state, this report address the magnitude of demographic change and the growing influence Hispanics have in state politics.

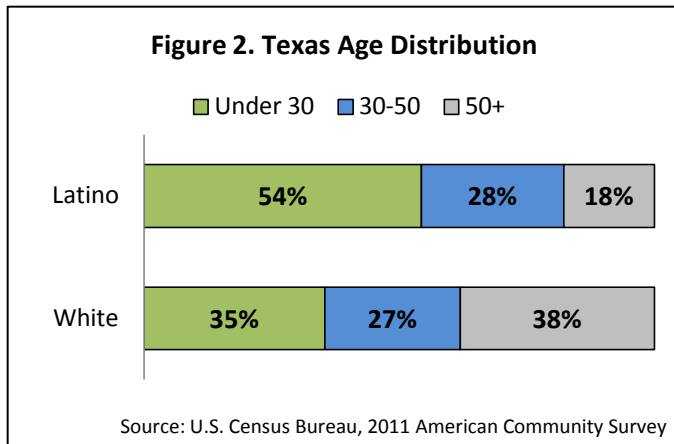
- The Hispanic population in Texas is just under 10 million, which is larger than the entire state population in forty-three states.
- Texas is already a minority-majority state, 38% of Texans are Hispanic. Within the next six years, Hispanics will constitute a plurality of the population (43% by 2020).
- Republicans have made significant gains in the state despite growth in the eligible Hispanic electorate, not because of it. In 2012, 70% voted to re-elect President Obama, and 56% of Hispanic voters identified as Democrats, 16% as Republicans. Adding in "leaners", Democratic share increases to 67%, and the GOP to 26%.
- Immigration rated the most important issue to 34% of Hispanic Texan voters. Over half (58%) have friends and family that are undocumented immigrants. Thus, 36% would be more likely to vote for a Republican candidate in the future if the GOP passes immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship.
- The majority of Texas Hispanics eligible to vote, 61%, did not cast a ballot in 2012. Texas would be as competitive as Florida in statewide elections if this untapped electorate voted.
- Only 25% of Texas voters were contacted by parties or organizations prior to the 2012 election. This abysmal mobilization effort to draw out registered Latino voters in Texas underscores the long-term effects of weak institutional investment.
- Hispanic voters stand to make Texas more competitive in more statewide contests than Congressional races because the districts are not competitive, and 26 of 36 districts have less than 25% Hispanic electorates.
- In 2008 and 2012, President Obama won the majority of votes in nearly all of Texas biggest cities and counties including Houston, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, El Paso, and the Rio Grande Valley. Parties need to build relationships to cultivate the hundreds of thousands more votes that could be won in these regions.

Demographic Trends

Hispanics comprise 38.2% of all Texans today; that is approximately 10 million out of 26 million residents in the state. Nearly 20% of all Latinos who live in the United States make their home in Texas. It is no surprise that the state already has a minority-majority population. By the end of the decade a plurality of the state (42%) will be Hispanic, and by 2040 the majority of Texans



will be of Hispanic origin. These trends are a product of 1,254 miles of border and centuries of history that Mexico and Texas share. It makes sense that 88% of Texas Hispanics are of Mexican origin (Tejanos).



Sharp age distribution differences within the current state population explain why the Hispanic population is growing at such an accelerated pace. Half of Hispanic Texans are under the age of thirty, but the same is true for only 35% of non-Hispanic whites. Only 18% of Hispanic Texans are over age fifty, compared to 38% of whites. Put another way, half of all Texans under

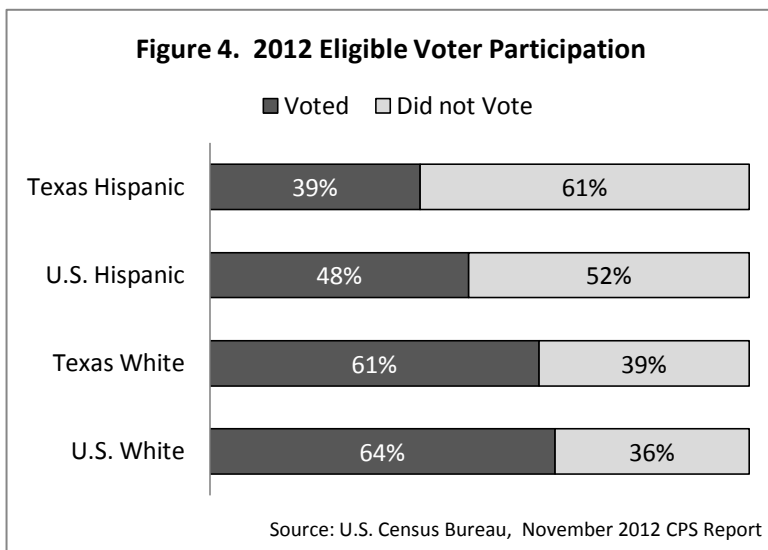
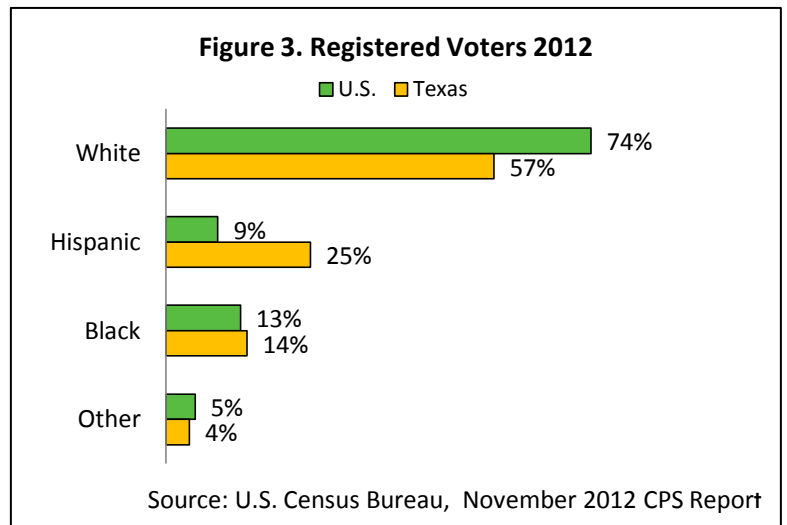
the age of eighteen are Hispanic, while 64% of Texans over 50 are non-Hispanic whites.

With respect to citizenship and nativity, the vast majority of Texas Hispanics are American citizens (77%) where 70% are U.S. born and 7% are naturalized citizens. Among the small share of foreign born Texas Hispanics, 65% have resided in the United States over fifteen years. In short, Hispanics have well-established roots in Texas.

State-Level Participation and Influence

Registration and Turnout

The Hispanic share of the total active Texas electorate (those who cast a ballot) is more than twice the national average. One out of four registered voters in Texas is Hispanic, compared to only 9% at the national level. In the 2012 election, 22% of all votes in Texas were cast by Hispanic voters; compared to only 8% nationally. Even so, Texas Hispanics are hitting well below their weight; turnout ranks among the lowest in the nation.

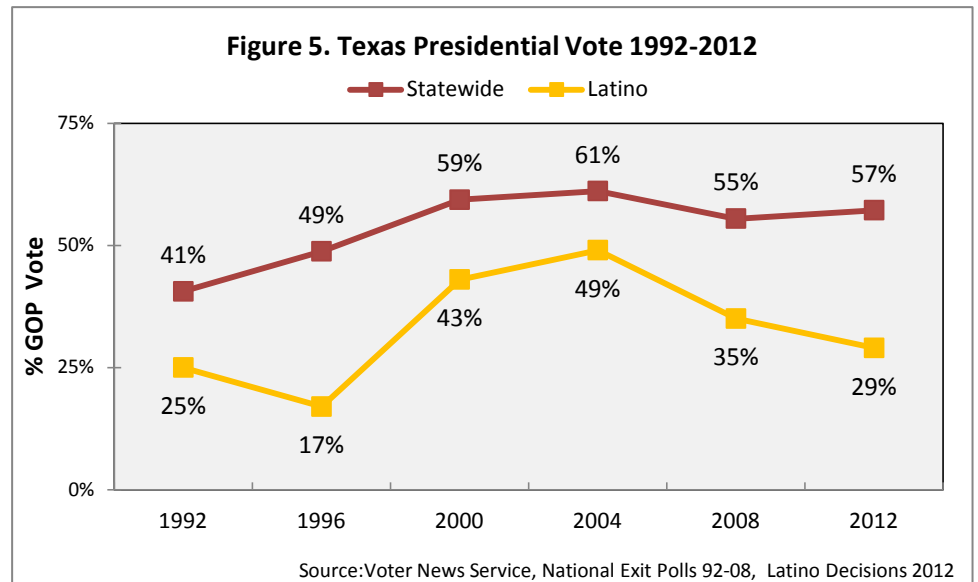


Considering the eligible electorate -- those over age 18 who are American citizens -- we find a stunning 61% of Hispanic Texans eligible to vote, did not participate in the 2012 presidential election. That is a twenty-two point turnout difference from their white counterparts in the state. The participation gap is especially large and persistent in Texas. State and Census Bureau

estimates place the non-voting, but eligible Hispanic population around 2.9 million; a striking number by any measure. The large proportion of unengaged Hispanics is part of what keeps Texas from being politically competitive. If Hispanic voter mobilization efforts were successful in the state, Texas would be as competitive as Florida in statewide contests, including presidential elections.

Turnout Scenarios: Presidential and Statewide Contests

Over the last two decades Texas has become more Republican and more Hispanic; a classic case of spurious correlation, as Figure 5 illustrates. It is true that the Republican party has been very successful in winning all statewide



offices, and picking up seats in the state legislature during this timeframe. However, those gains were made in spite of Hispanic votes, not because of them. Outside of George W. Bush's two presidential elections, GOP presidential candidates have struggled to reach above 30% of the state Hispanic vote. The most recent contests show Hispanic voters trending further away from the state average support for Republican presidential candidates.

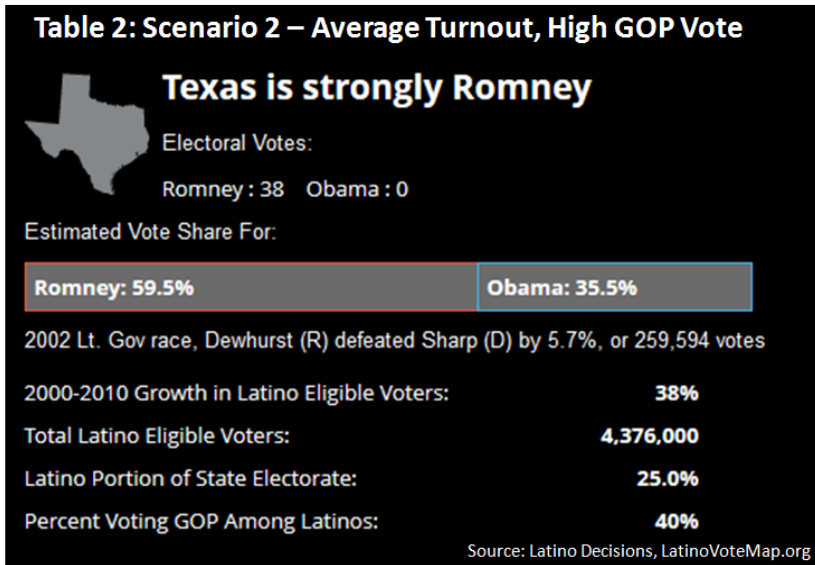
Despite the fact that 70% of Hispanic voters in Texas voted for President Obama, Mitt Romney carried the state by a sixteen-point margin (57 to 41). Table 1 details how Hispanic voters can turn an uncompetitive contest in to a tight race. If the additional 2.9 million eligible Hispanics had voted, Romney's victory margin would be less than one point.

	Romney	Obama	Win Margin
Actual	4,569,843	3,308,124	1,261,719
Eligible Latino non-voter (2.9m at 29/70 split)	+860,972	+2,078,209	
Total	5,430,815	5,386,333	44,482 (.4%)

Source: impreMedia/LD Election Eve Poll 2012; Texas Sec of State 2012 Election Results

Based on the Texas Election Eve Poll, we estimate the additional Hispanic vote split at 29% for Romney and 70% for Obama. Under those conditions, Romney's margin would narrow to a mere .4%. If Hispanic voters turned out at this rate, there would be extensive mobilization work from all manner of groups taking place in Texas, making it a true battleground. With thirty-eight electoral votes up for grabs, Texas would alter the tenor and electoral calculus of presidential campaigns.

Table 2: Scenario 2 – Average Turnout, High GOP Vote

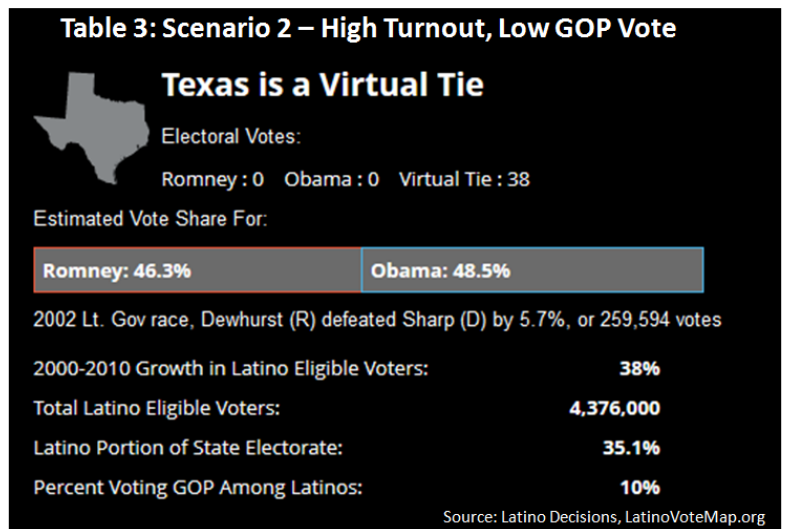


All of that said, increased Hispanic turnout is not destined to benefit Democrats. Two variables, turnout and party vote, determine which party will benefit most from heightened Latino participation. Table 2 outlines a scenario where more Hispanic voters help elect a Republican president. If Hispanics comprise 25% of the state electorate (it was 22% in 2012),

and 40% vote for the GOP candidate, the Republican party would win at huge margins, with 60% of the statewide vote. Looking back at Figure 5, that is precisely what occurred during the two contests where George W. Bush ran for the presidency. And, as we evaluate later in this report, a feasible goal for the party if they champion comprehensive immigration reform.

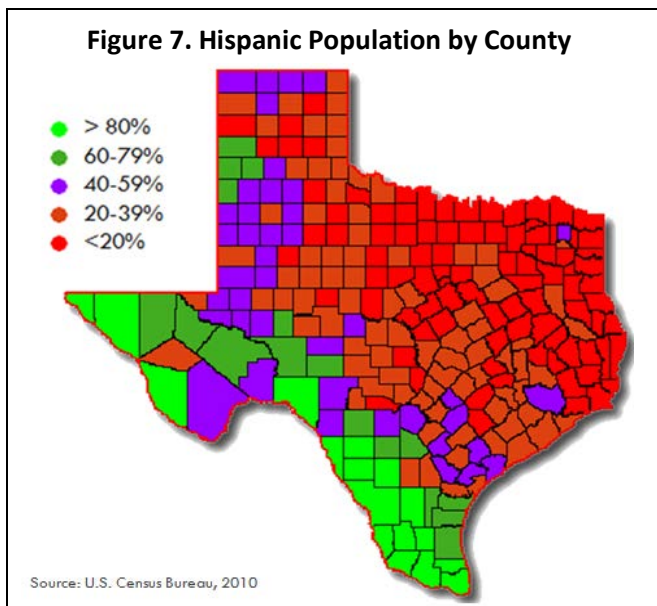
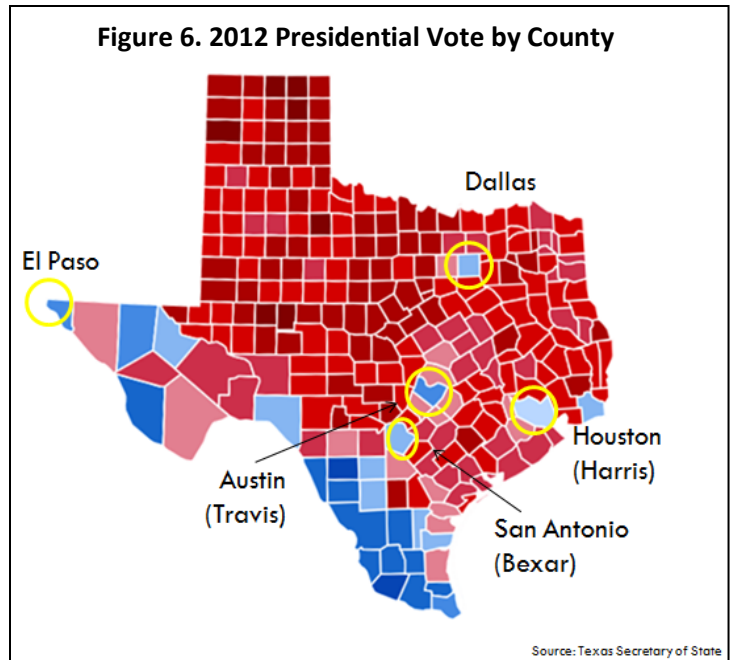
On the other hand, Table 3 illustrates a very different potential future. If the Hispanic GOP vote drops to the 10% range -- as it did in Colorado and Arizona in 2012 -- and turnout increases, then Democrats win with a two-to three point advantage. Hispanic voters are critical to election outcomes.

Table 3: Scenario 2 – High Turnout, Low GOP Vote



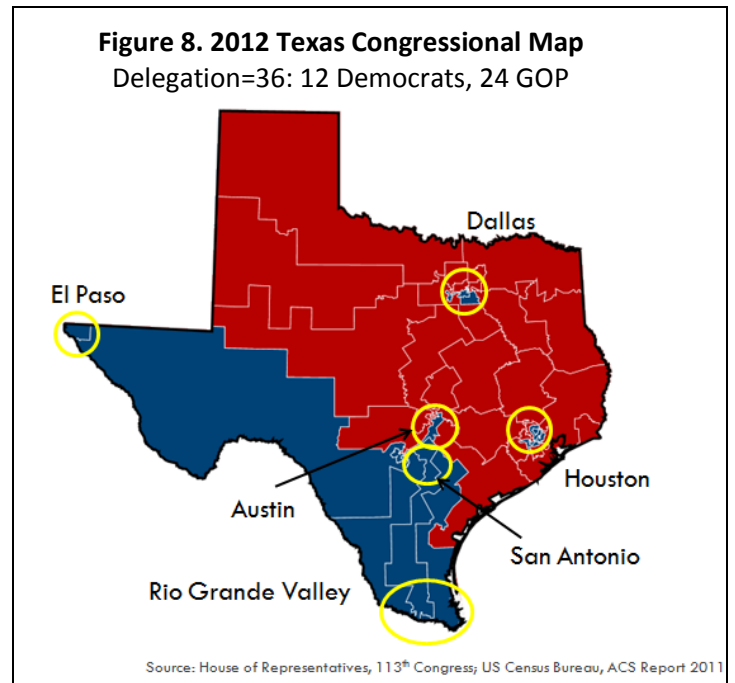
Constraints and Congressional Districts

In both demographic and geographic terms, Democrats are strongest where the population is largest and growing, while Republicans are strongest where the population is smaller and shrinking. Figure 6 shows the 2012 Presidential vote by county. President Obama carried the largest population cities and counties, with the exception of Fort Worth/Tarrant County. The same was true in 2008. In order for Texas to be competitive, turn out would need to increase among a broad base coalition of voters, not just Hispanics. The roots for such a coalition already in place in the state's more diverse places, like Dallas, Austin, Houston, and San Antonio. To be sure, the Republican Party understands this map, and recently [hired minority outreach staff and opened targeted field offices](#) in an effort to preserve their turf. The state Democratic Party does not have similar institutional support, though a new effort, [Battleground Texas](#), launched by Obama campaign veterans, has been fundraising and organizing these segments of the state over the past year.



Latino political influence in Texas is constrained due to population concentration in specific regions; Hispanics are not evenly distributed across the state as shown in Figure 7. Hispanics are 80% or more of the population in border areas like El Paso, Laredo, and the Rio Grande Valley. Metro counties Travis, Harris, and Bexar have are between 40% to 60% Latino. Suburban counties and the Dallas-Fort Worth area are less Hispanic, despite increases in those locales.

Population concentration has implications for representation; Hispanics are clustered in particular regions, and thus legislative districts. In 2012, thirty-four of the current thirty-six representatives from Texas won their elections by margins of eighteen points or more. Further, most of the Texas Congressional delegation and state legislature do not have significant shares of Hispanic voters in their districts (see Figure 8), allowing them to adopt policy positions that are detrimental or contrary to the preferences of most

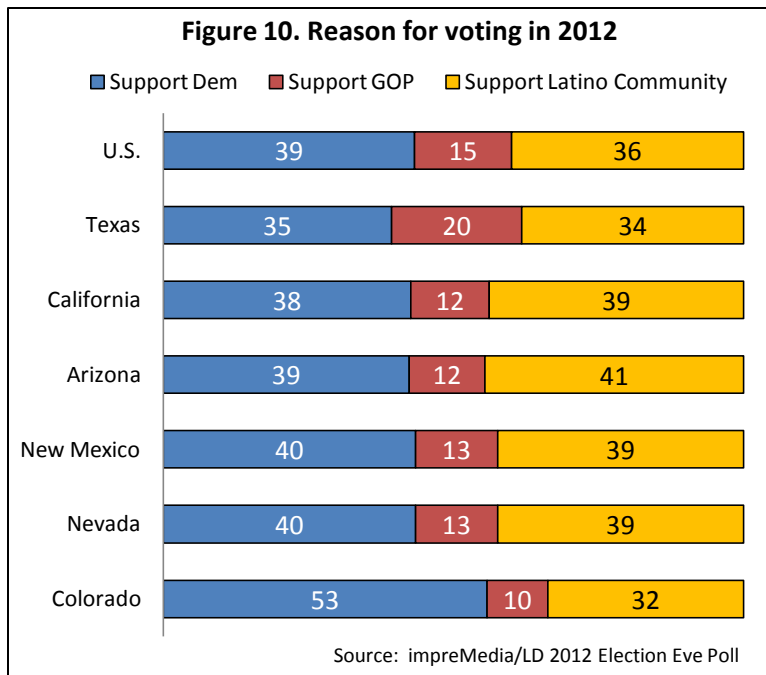
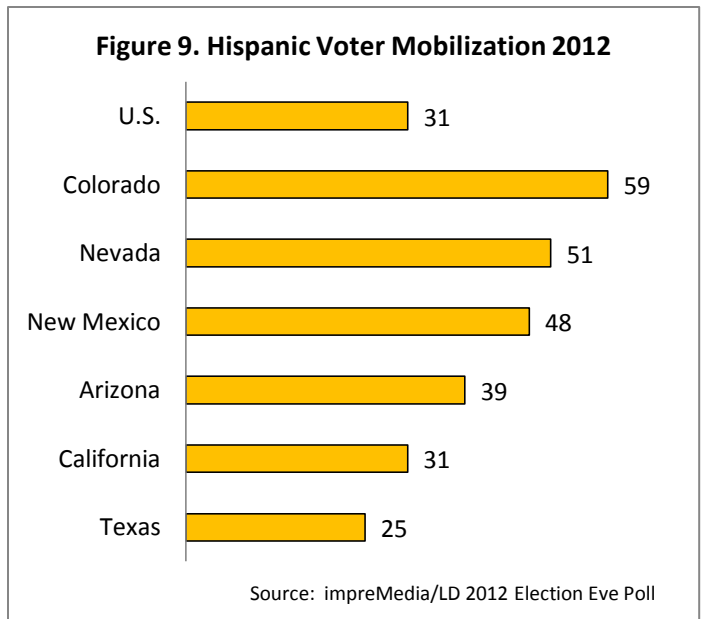


Hispanic Texans with little concern for political consequences on election day. For example, [not a single Republican Representative from Texas voted against](#) Iowa Rep. Steve King's amendment to repeal the deferred action program (DACA), a program that [boosted Hispanic support in Texas](#) for President Obama.

The scope of Hispanic voter influence is clearly observed in the policy positions adopted by office holders accountable to the statewide electorate. Hispanics account for about one out of five voters in general elections, thus moderate positions on immigration issues (for example Governor Perry's support for in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants who graduate from Texas high schools) signal attention to this electorate. Republicans in Congress harm the statewide prospects for their co-partisans when they adopt antagonistic policy and political approaches to immigration distasteful to Hispanic voters. The Republican controlled state legislature has significant authority over the redistricting process, thus it is unlikely that more Hispanic influence districts (very likely to support Democrats) will be created for some time. For this reason, measureable increases in Hispanic political impact are likely to surface sooner in statewide elections rather than Congressional or state legislative races.

Mobilization and Immigration Issues

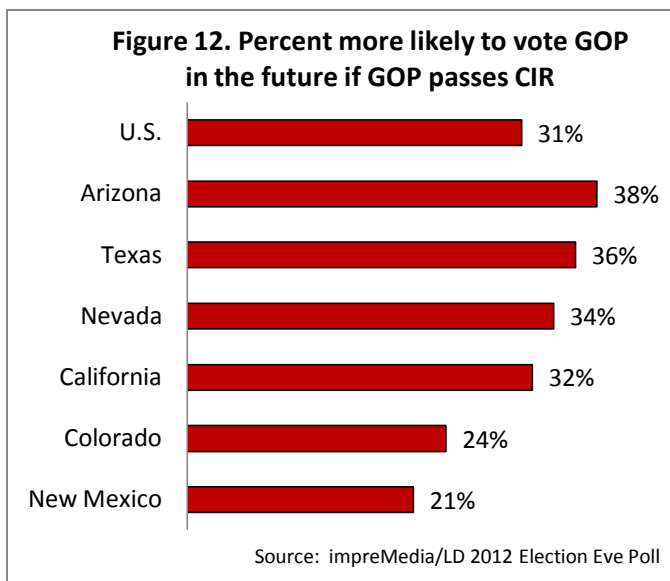
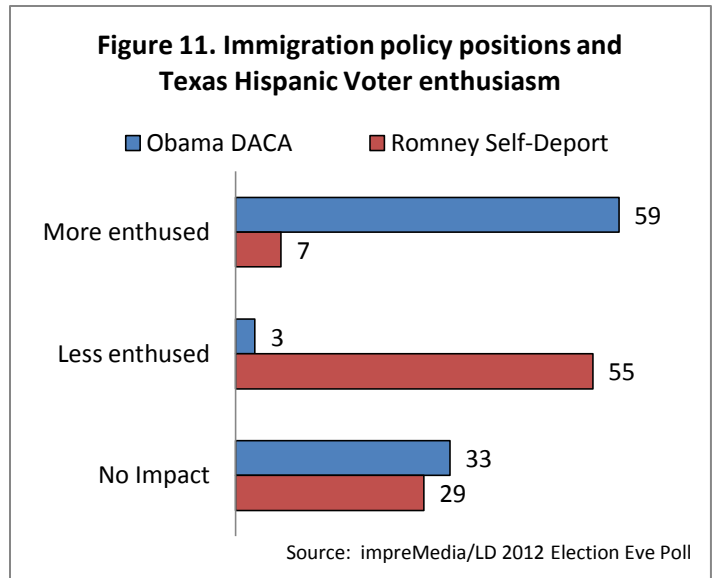
Hispanic voters in Texas are the most under-mobilized in the country, as reported in Figure 9. During the 2012 election, only 25% of Hispanic voters reported being contacted by campaigns or organizations encouraging them to vote. The national average was 31%, and in Colorado contact rates were highest at 59%. All other states in the West with similar Hispanic demography registered higher mobilization rates. Increasing national Hispanic voter turnout rates requires mobilizing Texas and California, where half of all Hispanic Americans reside.



Among those who did vote, Hispanic Texans reveal a strong sense of community motivation that rivals partisan attachments. 34% said they voted to support the Latino community, while 35% voted to support Democrats, and 20% to support the Republican party. In a state with little mobilization from either party, this makes sense. A third of those vote do so out of concern for their own group interests, not to advance one party over another.

These are instructive points for those interested in engaging the nearly three million non-voting, but eligible Hispanic voters in Texas: the opportunities for outreach are huge, and approaches that resonate with community interests are likely most effective.

Immigration issues weighed heavily upon Hispanic voters in 2012, and Texas was no exception. Over half of Latino Texans said that the President's decision on deferred action (DACA) made them more enthusiastic about supporting him. On the other hand, 55% of Hispanic Texans said that Romney's reference to self-deportation as a solution to immigration policy made them less enthused about his candidacy.



When asked about the current immigration debate, 36% of Texas Hispanic voters indicated they would be more inclined to support future Republican candidates if the party advanced comprehensive immigration reform including a pathway to citizenship (Figure 12). Texas Latinos rate above the national average on this point, and display more willingness to vote for GOP candidates compared to Latinos in several states.

Hispanic voters are American citizens, they do not directly benefit from deferred action or a pathway to citizenship. But, we also know that Hispanic voters are strongly motivated by factors important to their community (a third are voting for reasons unrelated to either party), which includes undocumented immigrants. In fact, [58% of Hispanic Texan voters](#) know someone who is an undocumented immigrant. It makes sense that such strong responses emerge when candidates and parties take clear positions on immigration.

Conclusions

- As the Hispanic population and eligible electorate continue to grow, signals of political influence will continue to surface. For the most part, these factors will be evident at the state level. At this point, Hispanic impact on the 2014 election is already evident. Republicans have stepped up outreach efforts by way of public events in Hispanic communities featuring Hispanic Republican elected officials, and [enhanced field](#) operations. Such investments are [negated](#) by many high-profile [GOP primary candidates](#) that focused their campaign messages [on anti-immigrant](#), and [tough on South Texas/border community](#) themes.
- Beyond 2014, there are larger trends to consider. For the most part, Hispanic voters are largely inclined to vote for Democrats, but their propensity to split-ticket vote and support Republican candidates is a well-documented matter of fact. President George W. Bush demonstrated a sincere interest in comprehensive immigration reform, and a respectful dialogue with Hispanic voters. The policy positions and personal overtures were well received by Hispanics in Texas and beyond, making his gains with this segment of the electorate a [model for Republican outreach](#).
- Immigration has divided the national Republican party, and re-shaped politics in several western states. To this point, Texas has avoided a signature-piece of legislation or anti-immigrant pied-piper to divide the electorate on ethnic and party lines. Should the party take this direction, they will find themselves in a very difficult position as the scenarios we illustrated suggest. Republicans in California, Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, and increasingly in Arizona, have seen how such antagonism mobilizes Hispanic turnout and increases Democratic vote share.