

The New American Electorate (2008)*The Growing Political Power of Immigrants and Their Children*

Executive Summary

October 14, 2010

At a time when federal, state, and local elections are often decided by small voting margins—with candidates frequently locked in ferocious competition for the ballots of those “voting blocs” that might turn the electoral tide in their favor—one large and growing bloc of voters has been consistently overlooked and politically underestimated: New Americans. This group of voters and potential voters includes not only immigrants who have become U.S. citizens (Naturalized Americans), but also the U.S.-born children of immigrants who were raised during the current era of large-scale immigration from Latin America and Asia which began in 1965 (the Post-1965 Children of Immigrants). These immigrants and their children have a powerful and highly personal connection to the modern immigrant experience that most other Americans do not. It’s one thing to hear family stories about a grandfather or great-grandfather coming to the United States during the much-romanticized “Ellis Island” era of immigration from Europe that ended decades ago. It’s quite another to belong to a family that is experiencing first-hand the political and economic realities of immigration today. The ranks of registered voters who are New Americans, or Latino or Asian, have been growing rapidly this decade and are likely to play an increasingly pivotal role in elections at all levels in the years to come, particularly in battleground states like Florida, Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico. As public opinion polls reveal, anti-immigrant political rhetoric is likely to motivate many New Americans to cast ballots, but is unlikely to win many votes for candidates perceived as anti-immigrant.

New Americans, Latinos, and Asians Are Large and Growing Shares of the U.S. Electorate**➤ New Americans Were 10.2 Percent (15 million) of All Registered Voters in 2008**

- 9.3 million were Naturalized Americans, accounting for 6.4 percent of registered voters.
- 5.7 million were Post-1965 Children of Immigrants, accounting for 3.9 percent of registered voters.¹

➤ Latinos and Asians Accounted for 10.7 Percent (15.6 million) of All Registered Voters in 2008

- 11.6 million Latinos comprised 7.9 percent of registered voters.

¹ Due to rounding, some totals do not sum exactly.

- 4 million Asians accounted for 2.8 percent of registered voters.
- **Between the Presidential Elections of 1996 and 2008, the Number of New Americans Registered to Vote Jumped 101.5 percent**
 - The number of Naturalized Americans registered to vote grew from 5.2 million to 9.3 million—an increase of 79.9 percent.
 - The number of Post-1965 Children of Immigrants registered to vote increased from 2.3 million to 5.7 million—an increase of 151.1 percent.
- **The Number of Latinos and Asians Registered to Vote Increased 79.4 Percent from 1996 to 2008**
 - The number of Latinos registered to vote grew from 6.6 million to 11.6 million—an increase of 76.6 percent.
 - The number of Asians registered to vote increased from 2.1 million to 4 million—an increase of 87.9 percent.

New Americans, Latinos, and Asians are Pivotal Voting Blocs in Many States

- **The number of New American Registered Voters Exceeded 2008 Presidential Victory Margins in 12 States:**
 - This was the case in **Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia**. In similarly close Presidential, Congressional, state house, or local elections today, the votes of New Americans could be decisive.
 - In **North Carolina**, New Americans accounted for 177,291 of the state's registered voters, while the margin of victory in the Presidential race was only 14,177 votes.
 - In **Virginia**, New Americans comprised 367,745 of all registered voters, while the margin of victory in the Presidential race was 234,527 votes.
- **The Number of Latino and Asian Registered Voters Exceeded 2008 Presidential Victory Margins in 15 States:**
 - This was the case in **Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia**. In similarly close Presidential, Congressional, state house, or local elections today, the votes of Latinos and Asians could be decisive.
 - In **Arizona**, Latinos and Asians accounted for 449,774 of the state's registered voters, while the margin of victory in the Presidential race was 195,404 votes.
 - In **Missouri**, Latinos and Asians comprised 42,629 of all registered voters, while the margin of victory in the Presidential race was only 3,903 votes.

New Americans, Latinos, and Asians Look to Immigration When Voting

➤ **The Votes of Latinos Are Influenced by Candidates' Stances on Immigration:**

- A poll conducted by LatinoMetrics in May and June of 2010 found that “since the end of 2009, immigration has catapulted to the top issue of personal concern among 1 in 4 Latinos—tied with jobs & the economy.” The poll also found that 8 in 10 Latinos regard immigration reform as being “of extreme importance.”
- Similarly, a poll conducted in June 2010 by Dr. Ricardo Ramirez for the NALEO Educational Fund found that 27 percent of Latino voters cited “immigration” when asked “what general issues would be most important to you in deciding whom to vote for?” Immigration ranked as one of the top three issues for one-third of Latino voters.

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