

Latina Voters Can Shape the Future of American Politics

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A Growing and Youthful Electorate

In recent decades, Latinas have increasingly influenced the outcomes of US elections as a youthful, growing, and diverse electorate.¹ As a population group that differs by race, ethnicity, and generational status, Latinas comprise a large share of voters in the Southwest, and their population growth exceeds overall population growth in key battleground states across the Sun and Rust Belts.²

Voter turnout in American politics is gendered. Since 1966 a higher proportion of women than men has reported voting in presidential elections, and the same has been true for midterm elections since 1986.³ While the gender gap in voter turnout rates is largest for Black voters, Latinas and non-Hispanic white women have

also voted at higher rates than their male peers since 1980.⁴ For example, in the 2020 presidential election, 68 percent of registered Latinas voted, compared to 62 percent of registered Latinos.⁵

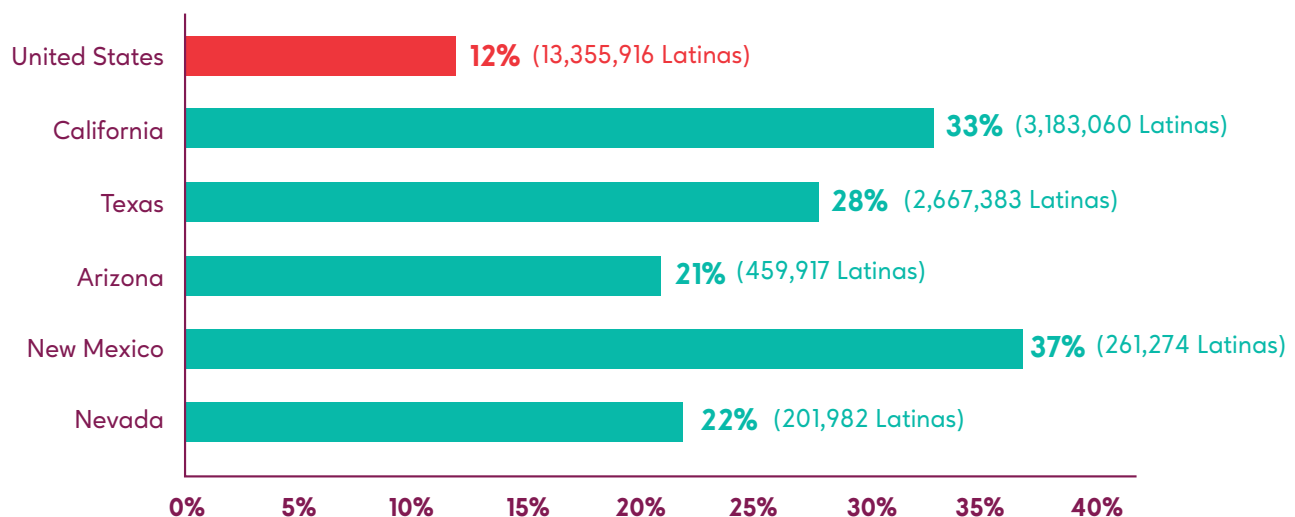
The youthfulness of the Latina vote speaks to Latinas' growing influence. Currently, the mean age of registered Latina voters in the United States is forty-five, compared to age fifty-three for non-Hispanic white women, a difference of eight years. Moreover, the gender gap in voter turnout is particularly sizable among voters between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four, with the Latina turnout exceeding the Latino turnout by six percentage points in 2020.⁶ If this trend continues, the outside influence of the Latina vote will continue to grow.

Latinas' Electoral Power in Key States

Currently, Latinas constitute 12 percent of all registered women voters in the United States. As a group that is geographically concentrated in certain states and regions, Latinas will likely be especially influential this election cycle in five states where they comprise over 20 percent of registered women voters: Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Collectively, these states are critically important in the Electoral College process, representing 116 electoral votes, or 21.6 percent of all electoral votes in the United States and 43 percent of the 270 votes necessary to win the presidential election.

The growth of registered Latina voters in the 2024 presidential election is significant. In California, the nation's most populous state, with 54 electoral votes, Latinas account for one in three registered women voters. In Texas, the nation's second-largest state, Latinas make up 28 percent of registered women voters. Meanwhile, in New Mexico they constitute 37 percent. Latinas also play a pivotal role in states where the presidential election remains highly competitive. In Arizona they represent 21 percent of registered women voters, and in Nevada, they make up 22 percent. Latinas' growing share of registered voters in Arizona and Texas is notable given the contentious debate in both states about women's reproductive rights.

Figure 1. Latinas as a Percentage of All Registered Women Voters in Five States and the US, August 2024⁷



Source: TargetSmart 2024

A Youthful, Influential Electorate

Latinas can significantly influence election outcomes. They have become a pivotal force in American politics, as evidenced by the growing number of those who are registered to vote. They now comprise a notable share of voters in states that will determine the outcome of the 2024 presidential election. Additionally, Latina voices can be especially consequential in competitive districts where issues such as women’s reproductive rights and affordable child and health care are at the forefront of political debates and offer critical distinctions between candidates.⁸

This sizable and growing group of Latinas provides an unmatched opportunity to shape election outcomes by increasing their participation as voters. Research shows that Latinas and other underrepresented US citizens are

more likely to vote when they understand how elections impact their communities.⁹ Moreover, many Latinas actively encourage family members and community stakeholders to engage civically and to participate in the electoral process. As trusted messengers, Latinas can relay information to two important groups of potential voters who are often ignored: low-propensity individuals, who are historically unlikely to vote, and new registrants. Given the outsize role of electorally engaged Latinas, it is essential for political campaigns, candidates, and interest groups to deploy robust, culturally tailored outreach strategies that address Latinas’ policy concerns. A vibrant, multiracial democracy depends on the participation of historically excluded groups like Latinas, whose influence will continue to grow in shaping the nation’s political future.

Authors’ Bios

Dr. Veronica Terriquez is a leader in higher education who examines the intersections of race, class, and gender through interdisciplinary research. As Director of UCLA’s Chicano Studies Research Center and Co-Founder of the Latina Futures 2050 Lab, she leads initiatives that empower youth and promote gender equity and supports UCLA’s Hispanic-Serving Institution goals. Dr. Terriquez holds a Ph.D. in sociology from UCLA, a M.A. in education from UC Berkeley, and a B.A. from Harvard University.

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Sonja Diaz is a civil rights attorney and policy advisor, recognized for advancing Latina representation and opportunities. As Co-Founder of the Latina Futures 2050 Lab, she leads initiatives addressing Latina underrepresentation in positions of power and influence. She co-founded and directed the first multi-issue think tank focused on Latinos in the University of California system. She holds a J.D. from UC Berkeley, a M.P.P. from UCLA, and a B.A. from UC Santa Cruz.

Endnotes

- 1 Christina E. Bejarano, *The Latino Gender Gap in U.S. Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- 2 The seven most competitive states in the race for presidency are Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. See Jie Zong, *A Mosaic, Not a Monolith: A Profile of the U.S. Latino Population, 2000–2020* (Los Angeles: UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute, 2022), latino-population-2000-2020.
- 3 “Gender Differences in Voter Turnout,” Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University–New Brunswick, accessed September 18, 2024, <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/voters/gender-differences-voter-turnout>.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 “The TargetSmart Voter Registration Dashboard,” TargetSmart, accessed September 18, 2024, <https://targetsmart.com/the-targetsmart-voter-registration-dashboard/>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid, noting that in August 2024 the number of registered Latinas in California was 3,183,060; in Texas, 2,667,383; in Arizona, 459,917; in New Mexico, 261,274; in Nevada, 201,982; in the United States, 13,335,916.
- 8 Isabelle Valdes, Audrey Kearney, Ashley Kirzinger, and Liz Hamel, “Polling Insight: 4 Key Takeaways about Hispanic Women Voters Nationally and in Arizona,” KFF, July 17, 2024, <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/poll-finding/polling-insight-4-key-takeaways-about-hispanic-women-voters-nationally-and-in-arizona/>.
- 9 Janelle Wong, S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee, and Jane Junn, *Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and Their Political Identities* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); Lisa García Bedolla and Melissa R. Michelson, *Mobilizing Inclusion: Transforming the Electorate through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012); Ricardo Ramírez, *Mobilizing Opportunities: The Evolving Latino Electorate and the Future of American Politics* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); and Veronica Terriquez, Randy Villegas, Roxanna Villalobos, and Jiayi Xu, “The Political Socialization of Latinx Youth in a Conservative Political Context,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 70 (2020): 101188, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0193397320301805>.