

## **Latino Politics Comes of Age: Lessons from the Golden State**

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### Chapter 3

As the twenty-first century begins, California Latino politics has reshaped the lens through which Latino politics nationally is viewed. This new image has three characteristics: Latinos are an active ethnic electorate, California Latino elected officials have achieved the critical mass to influence policy outcomes, and both political parties compete for Latino loyalty. This image is a marked contrast to the traditional view, which held that Latinos were present in the state in large numbers but were not an electoral force, that Latinos were unable to win statewide offices, and that both political parties (but more distinctly the Republicans) could ignore Latino policy preferences.

As the Latino population disperses, several other states face a similar demographic and political environment to California's in the 1990s. The Latino electorate nationally, and not just the Latino population, are growing and this Latino electorate is influenced, in part, by the anti-immigrant and anti-Latino sentiment that swelled in California in the mid-1990s. English-only laws and anti-immigrant organizations have surfaced in much of the Midwest and Southwest. Latinos are the largest minority group in twenty-three states. Recent mayoral elections in three of the largest cities in the United States (Los Angeles, Houston, and New York) demonstrate that Latinos can be players, if not yet regular winners, in the urban areas where they reside. The lessons learned in California are precursors for what other states will experience in the early decades of the twenty-first century. This chapter examines statewide developments in California's Latino community that brought about this change. In addition, we examine how these changes and their consequences are perceived by Latino political elites.

*The Changing Structure of California's Latino Community and Electorate*

The Latino electorate has grown from 8 percent of state's electorate in 1990 to approximately 14 percent in 2000 (see chapter 8). In raw numbers, this reflects a growth from roughly 800,000 Latino voters statewide to an estimated 1.5 million Latino voters in 2000 out of a statewide electorate of 10 million. Latinos have increased their share of registered voters in this same period from 10 percent to more than 16 percent (see table 3.1). There has been a corresponding increase in the number of Latinos elected to public office. In 1990, there were 572 Hispanic elected officials statewide. By 2000, the number had increased to 760. The most dramatic change occurred in the state legislature where the number of state representatives and senators increased from six to twenty-seven, an increase of 350 percent (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund 1990, 2001). Political gains, however, were not simply numerical. Statewide elected and political leadership offices, such as the lieutenant governorship, the speakership of the assembly, and the chair of the Democratic Party are now, or have been, held by Latinos during the past decade. Equally significant is that both political parties now

publicly acknowledge the importance of the Latino electorate (“They’ll Be Back” 2001; Marinucci and Wildermuth 2001). These gains and visible political presence were brought about by a confluence of demographic and political factors, as well as by institutional changes in the government of the state.

<insert table 3.1>

### **Population Growth and an Increasing Electorate**

California’s Latino population continues to grow at a faster rate than the white non-Hispanic population. As table 3.2 illustrates, the number of California Latinos increased by 38 percent between 1990 and 2000 and the non-Latino white population increased by only 2 percent during the same time period. Much of this growth was concentrated in Los Angeles County, where four out of ten Latinos in the state reside. Los Angeles County’s Latino population grew from 3,351,238 to 4,242,213; Latinos account for 45 percent of county residents.

<insert table 3.2>

The growth of the Latino electorate, however, is not simply a function of population growth that includes minors under eighteen and immigrants ineligible to vote. The electorate, however, builds as young people age, immigrants naturalize as U.S. citizens, and adult citizens register and vote.

California saw unprecedented numbers of permanent Latino residents naturalize as U.S. citizens in the 1990s. Nearly 600,000 Latinos naturalized between 1990 and 1999 (out of a total 1.6 million new naturalizees). No other decade saw such an increase in naturalized citizens in the Golden State. There were several reasons for this new level naturalization, some of which may not reappear in the future (DeSipio 1996b). Proposition 187 and the corresponding anti-immigration rhetoric that culminated in the passage of the national welfare reform bill in 1996 was probably the most important factor (Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn 1997; Segura, Falcón, and Pachon 1997; Pachon 1998). In addition, 3 million formerly undocumented immigrants who became legal permanent residents under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 became eligible for U.S. citizenship in the mid-1990s. More than one-third lived in California.

Third, new Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) policies, specifically a requirement that legal permanent residents renew their Alien Registration (“green”) cards, prodded some to seek naturalization. Fourth, the Mexican government’s decision to liberalize its property ownership policies and move toward a policy allowing dual nationality for Mexican émigrés encouraged others. Fifth, the Clinton administration changed longstanding INS policies and promoted naturalization among immigrants, at least briefly. Finally, and perhaps least recognized, was a recognition among Latino civic organizations, political leaders, and the Spanish-language media in California that naturalization was the missing link in Latino political empowerment strategies. It is not an exaggeration to say that the major barrios in East Los Angeles, Santa Ana, and the San Fernando Valley all experienced U.S. citizenship drives led by Latino organizations in the 1990s. The pro-U.S. citizenship message of these drives was reinforced on Univision and Telemundo. The combination of these factors resulted in new citizens becoming a large segment of the growing California Latino electorate.

### **Real or Perceived Growth in the Latino Vote?**

Some scholars have posited that increases in Latino voting are the result of population growth and not actual increases in voting and turnout (de la Garza, Haynes, and Ryu 2001; Shaw, de la Garza, and Lee 2000). Examination of the Los Angeles County Latino electorate demonstrates that Latino registration and voter turnout is growing rapidly (Barreto and Woods 2001). Between 1994 and 1998, turnout among registered Latinos increased, which largely benefited the Democratic Party. Examination of Los Angeles County voter registration records from 1994 and 1998 demonstrates that Latino registration and turnout grew more rapidly than non-Latino registration and turnout. These results are derived from the universe of registrants in Los Angeles County ( $n = 3.9$  million) and are not susceptible to confidence interval problems that a random sample of registered voters would be.

In 1994, 600,127 Latinos were registered to vote and in the general election that year 241,364 Latinos voted, a 40.2 percent turnout rate (see table 3.3). Four years later, the number of Latinos registered grew to 841,442 and the number of Latinos who voted increased to 358,826.

The net increase of 241,315 Latino registrants between 1994 and 1998 was a 40.2 percent jump in registration, while the addition of 117,462 Latino voters was a 48.7 percent increase, exceeding the growth rate for registration. As a result, the 1998 Latino turnout rate grew to 42.6 percent (Barreto and Woods 2001). The non-Latino vote increased by only 10.3 percent in this same period and non-Latino registration declined.

<insert table 3.3>

While most voting studies find that Anglos vote at higher rates than minorities, we find that Latino-registered voters in Los Angeles County turned out to vote at higher rates than non-Latino voters in 1998. We should note that turnout rates reported here are for registered voters, not for all U.S. citizen adults. When citizen adults are considered, Latinos have lower rates of turnout than non-Latinos.

There are also important partisan implications to the increases in registration and turnout. Previous scholarly research finds that Republicans vote at higher rates than Democrats (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Calvo and Rosenstone 1989; Wolfinger



and Rosenstone 1980). We find that in Los Angeles County in 1998 Latino Democrats turned out at the highest rates (46 percent). Non-Latino Republicans and non-Latino Democrats turned out at 44 percent and Latino Republicans at 41 percent.

New Latino registrants in Los Angeles County affiliate with the Republican Party at very low levels. Matt A. Barreto and Nathan D. Woods introduce the concept of “GOP detachment” to explain “the extent to which new Latino registrants fail to register with the GOP at rates consistent with Latino GOP registration in 1994” (2001). In Los Angeles County as a whole, both the Democratic and Republican Parties lost registration to third parties, but the GOP loss was five times greater than that of the Democrats. In 1994, 19.9 percent of all Latinos were registered with the Republican Party. Among Latinos who registered to vote in the four years between 1994 and 1998, only 10.3 percent registered Republican.

Party registration of the new Latino voters in 1998 provides additional evidence of Democratic dominance among Los Angeles County Latino voters. Of the 117,462 new Latino

voters, 88,000 were registered as Democrats, compared to only 8,221 as Republicans (and 21,241 as Independents or with third parties), a ten-to-one advantage for the Democrats.

*Political Factors and Latino Voter Mobilization*

This growth in the Latino vote and detachment from the GOP must be seen, in part, as an outgrowth of the conservative statewide ballot measures seemingly targeted at the Latino community. Other studies at both the aggregate and individual level support the claim that the Republican Party's support of such divisive initiatives as Propositions 187, 209, and 227 contributed to higher voter turnout rates as well as attachment to the Democratic Party during the late 1990s (Segura, Falcón, and Pachon 1997; Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura 2001; Barreto and Woods 2001).

California Latinos not only saw 187 as an anti-illegal alien measure, but also as an anti-Latino measure. The rhetoric of the campaign, the xenophobic statements by 187 proponents,

and the advertisements associating illegal aliens with Latinos more generally all had the impact of polarizing and mobilizing the community. As one Republican analyst noted:

<ext>187 was the catalyst for bringing all Latinos together. It was the Republicans who woke them up . . . they [Latinos] felt a common threat; they felt the community was under attack. What they felt was somebody saying “We don’t want you here, regardless of the fact that you and your family have been here for 400 years.” It was a personal attack; it was a cultural attack. And that has finally brought all these voters together in one group, a community united against a common threat, a common enemy.<sup>1</sup></ext>

Evidence of a newly mobilized Latino electorate can be seen in 1994 election results. The number of Latinos voting in 1994 equaled the number of Latinos voting in the preceding presidential election. No other state with a large Latino population exhibited this phenomenon.

Further impetus for Latino political mobilization came in 1996 and 1998 with two other statewide initiatives: Proposition 209, which eliminated racial and ethnic preferences in state and local government programs, and Proposition 227, which largely eliminated bilingual education.

Latino activists and political leaders saw both initiatives as antiminority. These propositions did not resonate as strongly among the Latino electorate as had Proposition 187. Three out of four Latino voters voted against 209 and two out of three voted against 227. In all three cases, the Latino vote contrasted markedly with the majority of Californians who overwhelmingly supported the propositions (187 passed with 60 percent of the vote, 209 with 55 percent, and 227 with 61 percent).

The three consecutive initiatives placing the Latino electorate at odds with the majority electorate polarized Latinos in a way not previously seen in California. The traditional basis of ethnic politics has been the common identification with a group on the basis of race, religion, or nationality (Hawkins and Lorinskas 1970). Unintentionally perhaps, during three elections the solidarity of Latino voters in California statewide elections was reinforced.

Can this unity continue? Some would say that without the impetus of a hot-button issue, Latino voter participation would decline. As one political leader stated:

<ext>You saw in March of 2000 for the first time since November of 1994, the Latino share of the electorate actually dropped; and the reason is because there was no emotional wedge issue . . . no overarching enemy. And so the question then becomes one of sustainability, and I think that is one of the biggest questions facing the community going forward. It was easy when you were being attacked. The question is: Can anybody present a positive cohesive agenda for this growing electorate? And my answer is no.</ext>

### **Term Limits**

Proposition 140, passed by California voters in 1990, restricted state legislative officeholders in the assembly to three two-year terms (six years total) and to two four-year terms in the state senate (eight years total). With this, “the California state legislature became the first modern American legislature to have a complete term limit mandated membership turnover in one of its chambers” (Caress 1998: 00). Prior to the 1990s, longevity in office characterized the California state legislature. At the local level, turnover rates were higher as office competed for offices up

the political ladder, but at the state legislative level turnover was absent. During the 1980s—a period that spanned 400 separate state legislative elections—only 5 of the 120 incumbent legislators in the California Assembly and Senate were defeated (Heslop 1990). Term limits benefited Latino candidates by opening up additional seats when current members “termed out” or left their seats early to pursue a higher office (Block and Zeiger 1990; Caress 1998; Hero et al. 2000). Coupled with the effect of state propositions, term limits opened the door to Latino representation and subsequently produced a greater role for Latino legislators for the state of California as a whole.

Senior legislators left office in 1996, when many state assembly members termed out and in 1998 when a similar limit applied to state senators. This triggered a phenomenon of more special elections being held for the state legislature than ever before. As legislative incumbents sought new positions, they left their current offices, which in turn became open seats. In twenty-four of the twenty-six legislative seats held by Latino members in 2000, the incumbent won the seat the first time in an open race without an incumbent running. Only two defeated incumbents.

With shorter legislative careers, rotation of top leadership positions in the legislature as a whole and in committees also occurred. Prior to 1995, for example, Willie Brown held the assembly speakership for fifteen years. Since 1995, there have been six speakers, including two Latinos. As of March 2001, Latinos held thirty-one of the key committee positions in the assembly, serving as chairs or vice chairs, fourteen committee leadership positions in the senate, and on five joint committees. Latino members serve in leadership capacities on powerful committees such as budget, judiciary, labor, transportation, health and human services, and water and parks, as well as select committees on California-Mexico affairs, agricultural imports and exports, school safety, health access, and many more.

### **Geographic Dispersion**

While important, term limits are not the only factor that have expanded opportunities for Latinos seeking public office. Although the California Latino community is still concentrated in southern California, the population has dispersed across the state. Twenty-nine congressional districts in

California now have 100,000 or more Latino constituents. In a state where one out of three residents is Latino, this figure should not be surprising. What may be counterintuitive is that twelve of these twenty-nine congressional districts are outside the southern California counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino. There are now sizeable Latino communities in the central region of California and the Bay area. Congressional districts in Fresno, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Sacramento, Alameda, and Santa Clara also have large Latino constituencies.

These Latino communities outside of southern California have seen voter mobilization and have elected Latinos to school boards and to municipal and county levels. Many of these elected officials are “cross-over candidates”—that is, officials whose ethnic constituency is not the majority of the electorate in their district. As one Democratic Party official stated:

<ext>Prior to 1992, there weren't any Latinos in the state legislature outside of Los Angeles City. And in 1992 you got somebody from the Inland Empire [Riverside and San Bernardino Counties] in the assembly. And in the next year Cruz Bustamante from the Central Valley. And



the following, you had Liz Figueroa from Alameda. And Denise Ducheny from San Diego. Latino politicians began to emerge outside of traditional ethnic-hyphenated districts. The new immigrant voter was the backbone of that surge in new Latino voices in California.</ext>

### **New Campaign Strategies**

In addition to the dispersion of the Latino electorate and the impact of term limits, new campaign techniques also aided the emergence of Latino elected officials throughout the state. One of the traditional images associated with the Latino electorate has been the low turnout of Latinos on election day. In an earlier analysis of the Latino vote, one of the authors of this chapter noted that Latino elected officials were often told by majority party officials of the low turnout figures in their districts and how this affected cost-benefit decisions in allocating party resources (Pachon and Arguelles 1994). One of the significant changes in the 1990s was the introduction of new campaign techniques specifically designed to mobilize Latino immigrant and working-class electorates. As one Latino officeholder stated:

<ext>Old political consultants devalue mobilization as an effective part of the political campaign budget and promote heavy mail programs. And while your message is an important part of the campaign, Latino elected officials rely more heavily on mobilizing people to vote. . . . The fact is that people don't vote if you don't reach out to them. If you shake more hands than your opponent you will win. The reason the Latino voting percentages were less historically, I believe, is because nobody reached out to them.</ext>

Latino elected officials credit the resources devoted to field campaigns—where there is direct voter contact by volunteers or campaign staff—as being the key to victory of many Latinos in the 1990s. Two other factors were also present. First, under the leadership of state Senator Richard Polanco, party leaders raised money to finance intensive field operations. Second, unions provided funds and volunteers for field operations. With all of these factors converging in the 1990s, the Latino electorate has mobilized to a previously unprecedented degree and is playing a more important role than ever before in California's state politics.

*Interpreting Latino Political Gains in the State*

What difference has it made for the Latino community in the state that Latinos have made such significant political gains? How do Latino civic leaders view these changes? What difference has it made on public policy issues? In order to address these questions, we interviewed fourteen high-ranking Democratic and Republican Latino elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels. We promised confidentiality in regards to attribution in order to ensure candid responses. While such a small set of interviews cannot be representative of all California Hispanic elected officials, these interviews offer substantive insight into the political meanings of increasing Latino electoral turnout and the growing numbers of Latinos elected to office in California.

How do Latino political leaders view the changes in Latino politics in the state? These leaders predominantly give two answers. Perhaps not surprisingly, the first change that Latino political leaders cite is the rise in the numbers in their ranks. For example, as one leader stated: <ext>The fact that there's been a growth in representation at the state level specifically. Also at the local levels, there's been a large turn over, some of the more traditional smaller cities . . .

some of the smaller cities that have been more traditionally represented by Anglo elected officials even though they have large Latino populations have started to change, you know the Cudahys, the Huntington Parks, and so. I mean throughout the state, for instance, you go to Gilroy or Watsonville and you start seeing those changes.</ext>

In the state legislature, the increased presence of Latinos is the most obvious. As one of our respondents observed, “There is isn’t one piece of major legislation that doesn’t have to have a Latino on it somewhere at some committee level, at the chairmanship level, at the leadership level. . . . It’s sort of standard now, with the number of Latino legislators.” Relatedly, a Latino Democrat observed:

<ext>With the build up of Latino voters and the new leadership, the infrastructure has blossomed in a way where Latinos are throughout the leadership and throughout the ranks, both in terms of the infrastructure of the party, within the donor base, within the advocacy base, within just about every facet, including having the chairman of the party be a Latino, and having major representation at the state and national level, as members of the executive board.</ext>

The second most common observation is on the growth of the Latino electorate. Typical of the responses included:

<ext>Registration of new immigrant citizens. Over the last I'd say eight years, all the growth in enrollment as voters in California is the result of Latino new immigrant citizen voters. And significant within that is not just the number, but also the participation of those voters. Their participation was greater than any other demographic group. But when you segregated the new immigrant voter, that voter who voted after 1994 or registered after 1994. That voter was a very motivated voter, a new immigrant voter who had gone through quite a bit of bashing and big issue politics being played out on a both state and national stage. So if I'd say the one most significant thing.</ext>

Yet, another political leader saw the growth of the Latino electorate in larger terms:  
<ext>[Latinos have] emerged from a small niche segment of the electorate into a true member of the governing coalition. And beyond that, I think the next ten years [are] going to take us from a member of the governing coalition to the central core of who governs California.

In 1990, again you exist more as an exotic niche, where you can get away—both Democrats and Republicans could get away with kind of the “viva” campaigns and the quick photo ops down on Olvera Street. Now as we’ve certainly more than doubled our share of the electorate in those ten years, and in many ways have been overrepresented in terms of political weight and our political weight is needed, whether it’s for the win elections or to move legislation, or to sway public opinion to win elections, to move legislation or to sway public opinion. And for that to occur in a ten-year period is really virtually unprecedented in American history in the size and scope of a place like California.</ext>

Our respondents also noted other changes. The professionalization of political campaigns, the increasing sophistication of Latinos who are running for office, and the emergence of “cross-over” candidates are seen as factors that are different now than a decade ago.

What are the differences in policy outcomes resulting from the presence of Latino elected officials in larger numbers? The presence of minority elected officials has an impact on the bureaucracy and on the legitimacy of ethnic group issues. In response to the question “What

difference in public policy has it made that Latino elected officials are now present in visible numbers?" the literature suggests that the presence of minority elected officials has a corresponding impact on the bureaucracy and the legitimacy of ethnic group issues. Once again, our respondents agree with these findings. In response to the question "What difference has it made to have more Latinos in elected office?" respondents identified the following issues:

<ext>First of all, within the city bureaucracy, there was an outreach, so the bureaucracy reacted to my presence. And some of the managers came and offered specific programs. Others were responsive when I called; certainly, there were some who tried to avoid doing anything, [even though] that's typical . . . there seemed to be a real hope. But our perspective is still a perspective that comes from our base. Our base is generally [a poor and working-poor community]. It is a small business community. It is a community that is short on all services from health care to education. And so our impact is reflected on our push for more services in all of those areas that are basically driven from a perspective of those who want to improve conditions for poor and working poor in our community—the disenfranchised. I don't think that the advances, the

amount of money that has been invested in health care, the amount of money that has been invested in education, and the amount of money in affordable housing last year would not have been possible without Latino elected officials being present.</ext>

Furthermore, on the issue of policy legitimacy the following observation was made:  
<ext>The obvious thing is when you have more people who share the same experience on the decision-making body, it really elevates the consciousness of the remaining members in terms of that experience. When you have more people who share the same experience, it really raises the consciousness of the other members of that building body. When three people talk with [a] similar background about an issue and give a similar perspective, it really raises the issue to a different level of understanding from that person's viewpoint. Whether it is Latino, African American, or any other ethnic group of basically a unique experience.</ext>

The political leaders interviewed for this study were adamant that on issues such as food stamps for immigrants, funding for affordable housing, English-language instruction, and the presence of Latino elected officials has made a difference. Moreover, their presence has also put



their respective jurisdictional bureaucracies in a position of having to respond to Latino constituents.

Yet, curiously most Latino leaders interviewed for this study rejected the idea that it was a unique “Latino agenda.” According to the respondents, the issues are similar for Latinos and non-Latinos: health care, quality education, and safe neighborhoods. While there are hot-button issues, such as immigration, bilingual education, and affirmative action, of particular interest to the Hispanic community, these are the exceptions and not the rule. Yet, within the issues of common concerns between Latinos and non-Latinos, there are differences in emphasis. For example, as one respondent stated:

<ext>Take affordable housing, a huge issue; it’s going to get bigger. And it’s going to get bigger. And its become a much more intrinsic problem, a specific problem to the Hispanic community. Why? Because again, we’re younger. We have young families and we’re less affluent. We’re also in our first home-buying years, and there’s not enough housing stock for Latinos to buy our first houses. I mean you can’t expect Latinos to go up to Ventura or San Bernardino County and

buy a \$300,000 home three years out of school. And the fact that we're not building enough homes means that our community is going to be disproportionately affected by issues like that. Education: the state legislature is going to come out with a report, if they haven't already, showing this clustering problem that Senator Ortiz has basically identified, showing that upward of 70 percent of Latino children are clustered in the bottom 30 percent of underperforming schools. While education affects all, it affects our community much differently.</ext>

Other respondents also noted a different emphasis when they identified health care as an issue affecting everyone in California, yet affecting Latinos in a slightly different way. For most Californians, according to the respondents, health care issues center around HMO reform; for Latinos, health care reform is a matter of *access* to affordable health care. Thus, in a way a possible contradiction exists. While there may not be a specific self-identified Latino agenda, there may well be a Latino dimension to some of the major issues affecting all Californians. This Latino dimension is driven in part by the average lower socioeconomic status of the community.

What issues do the respondents envision gaining in importance in the future? The respondents identify a self-awareness of a new role of Latino leaders and the Latino electorate.

One leader stated the following:

<ext>And I would . . . tell you that probably the greatest fear I have about our growth, is that as we're starting to wield power and starting to grow. And we're starting to acquire positions of influence in government and in other places, that we don't forget that as we were starting to acquire positions of influence in government and in other places, that we don't forget that we were marginalized, [and] that we don't forget about the other people who are still marginalized and are being marginalized at all times in the process. . . . I know there's a lot of discussion about how Latinos are going to take over of the African American seats. I know that's something that takes place in terms of the inner workings in some of the political inner circles. Yet, there hasn't been one case where a Latino has run against an African American candidate and beaten [him or her] out of a seat. That can't be said for other groups.</ext>

The concern about Latinos being pitted against African Americans is also mentioned in the context that Latino versus black scenarios are always mentioned, but little corresponding attention has been paid to the fact that black legislators who have lost their seats have lost them to white non-Hispanic candidates.

An additional dimension of the future of Latino politics that is mentioned by respondents is the impact of Latino policy preferences that do not fall neatly into traditional liberal and conservative categories. One respondent focused on this issue in particular:

<ext>[The impact] of the electorate and the increased number of Latinos has moved . . . a more progressive that is aimed at helping a population who has economic concerns first and foremost. Yet, in macro terms it has had the affect of buffering some of the excesses of both parties and you don't see that as much in [the] Republican Part[y] quite as clearly as you do in the Democratic Party. You have to remind yourself that there's a very corollary side between the emergence of Latino power in the Democratic Party and its moderation. It's no longer the party of Jerry Brown. It's no longer the party of Willie Brown. It's more a party of Cruz Bustamante. .

. . That's not a coincidence. . . . You're also going to see that begin to occur among Republicans over the course of the next ten years. The presence of Latino activists in the Republican Party will tend to present a more moderate, a more tempered and more tolerant approach to policy. I don't think you're going to see a lot of the emotional rhetoric coming from the Republican Party that you saw.</ext>

If this perspective is correct, then one may expect major changes to occur in both parties. Already there were four Republican Latino state legislators in office who had established a Hispanic Caucus of their own and hoped to recruit other Latinos to run under the Republican banner. If they prove successful, these new Latino candidates may end up challenging white Republicans for elective office. At the same time, the policy positions of Latino Democrats on key issues will not coincide in all cases with traditional liberal positions within the Democratic Party. For example, Latinos may have conservative viewpoints on issues such as gay rights, welfare, and criminal justice.

A mobilized electorate, the dramatic growth of Latino political elites at all levels of California government, and an awareness of Latino political strength by the major parties captures the new political environment confronting California's Latinos and all Californians. Major questions still remain unanswered. Will new Latino voters continue to participate at the levels that they did in the past? Now that Latino naturalization numbers have declined from their highs of the late 1990s, will the presence of a growing number of noncitizens affect the politics of the group? Finally, with both political parties acknowledging the presence of Latinos, what impact will this have on ethnic bloc voting for the future? While these questions call for further inquiry, there is little doubt that the 1990s irrevocably changed Latino politics in the Golden State.

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1. We conducted interviews with fourteen senior Democratic and Republican California Hispanic elected officials. We selected interviewees based on their knowledge of California politics. Interviewees include federal, state, and local officials. We promised each anonymity in order to ensure candor.

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**Table 3.1. Change in California Registered Voters, by Race and Ethnicity, 1990–2000**

	1990	% of total	2000	% of total	Change
White	10,600,000	78.6	10,500,000	71.8	-100,000
Latino	1,350,000	10.0	2,350,000	16.1	+1,000,000
Black	950,000	7.0	900,000	6.2	-50,000
Asian/Other	600,000	4.5	900,000	6.2	+300,000
Total	13,500,000	14,650,000	+1,150,000		

*Note:* Due to rounding, percentages for each year may not equal 100.

*Source:* Field Institute (2000).

**Table 3.2. California Population Growth, by Race and Ethnicity, 1990–2000**

	1990	% of total	2000	% of total	% Growth
White	17,131,831	57.2	17,421,511	50.3	1.7
Latino	7,774,789	26.0	10,688,752	30.8	37.5
Black	2,105,207	7.0	2,337,935	6.7	11.1
Asian	2,745,781	9.2	3,999,427	11.5	45.7
Other	184,789	0.6	205,770	0.6	11.4
Total	29,942,397		34,653,395		15.7

*Note:* Due to rounding, percentages for each year may not total 100.

*Source:* Authors' compilations based on U.S. Bureau of the Census data



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**Table 3.3. Latino and Non-Latino Registration and Voting, Los Angeles County, 1994–1998**

	1994	1998	Change	% Change
Latino				
Registration	600,127	841,442	+241,315	+40.2
Voting	241,364	358,826	+117,462	+48.7
Turnout	40.2%	42.6%		+2.4
Non-Latino				
Registration	3,064,212	3,043,499	-20,713	-0.7
Voting	1,142,197	1,259,517	+117,320	+10.3
Turnout	37.3%	41.4%		+4.1

*Source:* Barreto and Woods (2001: table 1).