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Abstract**

**Trends in Voter Participation Among the Foreign-Born Population:
Analysis of the Current Population Survey, 1996-2006**

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The Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplement, conducted biennially by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor, provides the most comprehensive examination of demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the nation's electorate. While it is left to other surveys and exit polling to examine political opinions, attitudes, and party identification, the CPS, as a large, nationally-representative survey, is unsurpassed in its capacity to characterize the electorate on the basis of the fundamental question: "Did you vote?"

Because political power and resulting policy formation and resource distribution are keenly responsive to demographic forces in any representational democracy, it is clear that discussions often reserved for political scientists stand to benefit from increased demographic analysis. The argument becomes increasingly pertinent as our society moves toward "majority minority" racial and ethnic composition, and traditional patterns of voting begin responding to these demographic shifts.

Numerous studies have documented close relationships between tendency to vote and such factors as educational achievement, income, occupation, and age. Race, ancestry and gender also influence voting behavior, although with less consistency in strength and direction. Less is known about the roles of nativity and region of birth, characteristics that will increasingly affect voting trends as the foreign-born population grows in size and diversity. This paper reviews the literature on nativity and voting behavior, and then explores trends that appear in the CPS data over a ten-year period (1996-2006).

Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau show the nation's robust population growth in the twenty first century will be driven largely by immigration. Consequently, electoral outcomes will increasingly reflect immigrant voting behavior and the underlying interests and values. While it might be argued that these trends are of little consequence to electoral behavior already shaped by America's long history of immigration, this may overlook recent trends regarding the proportion of first generation immigrants, world region of birth, and U.S. region of residence.

On the basis of prior research documenting significant relationships between CPS data and voting behavior outcomes (Bass and Casper, 1999), this paper explores the possible

electoral ramifications of demographic change. A series of graphical presentations, some employing GIS maps to link data with state geographies, will show the growing significance of naturalized citizen voting. While this demographic group's relative size is small nationwide (around one in twenty voters), the proportion nearly doubles when considered on the regional and state scales, e.g., the West and California, respectively. Of further interest is the composition of the naturalized voter cohort by world region of birth and their respective U.S. geographic regions of residence.

Special emphasis is given to the one demographic cohort that clearly outweighs the rest and holds the best prospect of demonstrating significant outcomes in terms of voting behavior: voters born in Latin America and Mexico in particular. Particularly in the Western and Southern regions of the United States, voters of Latin American origin constitute well over one third of the naturalized electorate and well over half in certain states of these regions.

Political scientists are beginning to look closely at these phenomena, having only recently recognized the tremendous potential for analysis offered by the CPS (Ramakrishnan, 2005). Because the survey was not primarily designed as an instrument for political analysis, they must augment its data from other sources in order to measure important attitudinal variables that affect party identification.

Immigrant political participation is treated by scholars as a "sleeping giant" because of its significant and yet unexercised potential to shape political outcomes in twenty-first century America. Voting rates (the proportion of "yes I voted" responses measured by the CPS) among naturalized citizens consistently lag behind native rates by nearly ten points, but this deficit can narrow substantially as immigrant groups become assimilated and mobilize politically around issues (such as immigration reform policy) that affect them directly. In fact, this mobilizing effect is strong enough to induce a reversal in voting trends within ethnic cohorts. Naturalized Hispanics have been shown to vote at higher rates than native Hispanics of the second generation (Bass and Casper, 1999).

While measurement of attitudinal factors that affect voter mobilization and assimilation has traditionally been the domain of political science and sociology, demographic analysis provides an understanding of the objective "material" from which such measurement must be undertaken. While this paper primarily considers variables of nativity and region of birth, it makes reference to necessary wider studies involving factors of ethnicity and ancestry, as refined by age and year of entry. By means of this wider perspective, one can appreciate the full potential of the demographic forces under discussion here. Considering the youthful age structure of the second generation, and recent campaigns to promote naturalization among those who are eligible, there is evidence of electoral potential among latent demographic cohorts. Analysis of multi-year CPS data offers a unique window into this process.

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