

The Politics of Prosperity: A Look into California's Latino Representation Challenge

A project of the
California Legislative Latino Caucus
and
The Leadership California Institute



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Foreword

2016 promises to be a pivotal year for Latinos in California.

Having emerged as the state's largest ethnic group, the Latino community's ability to attain a quality education, work in a career suited for the new economy, afford to buy a home and be reflected in our representative government are at a crossroads.

Throughout its history, California has held a place in the country's imagination where dreams could be realized and opportunity abounded. For generations of newcomers to this golden place, California has always delivered on that promise.

Unfortunately, for this new generation of Californians, that promise is at risk. Our middle class is shrinking, poverty is increasing and the gap between the haves and have-nots is growing. By nearly all indicators, Latinos are disproportionately affected by these trends.

By extension, the prognosis for a vibrant growing middle class is bleak.

Latino social, political and economic success in the coming years will define our state's legacy as a place where the American Dream can still be realized—or not.

This report, "The Politics of Prosperity: A Look into California's Latino Representation Challenge," examines the key metrics that make Latino upward mobility and a more representative government possible. It examines the interconnected elements of political representation, civic engagement, voter participation and economic mobility.

Further, it illustrates the diverse nature of the Latino community by region and the challenges facing the state in building a vibrant and attainable middle class.

By developing a 'Latino Prosperity Index,' we have identified key data points which have historically pointed towards upward social and economic mobility. While regional variations make simple policy solutions difficult, there is one undeniable common characteristic preventing Latinos from realizing middle class status and proportional representation in government: Poverty.

The choice before us then is between the road towards prosperity or poverty—and the future of a new California middle class hangs in the balance.



Luis A. Alejo
Assemblymember 30th District
Chairman, California Latino Legislative Caucus



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Executive Summary

Nearly 15 million Latinos call California home. Having surpassed the state's white population in 2014 with 39 percent of the total population, it is now the most concentrated Latino population in the United States.

However, this significant boost in population has seen very little translation to civic engagement or elected representation. While Latinos have seen progress in both the level of representation and their capacity to secure leadership positions, Latinos still lag significantly in representation at all levels of California government, especially the local level.

Percentage of Elected Offices Held by Latinos in California:

- US Senate: 0
- Congressional: 18.9 percent
- State Constitutional Office: 12.5 percent
- State Senate: 12.5 percent
- State Assembly: 23.8 percent
- County Supervisors: 10.1 percent
- City Council: 14.7 percent
- School Board: 13.5 percent

Furthermore, Latinos lag the general population in key indicators of economic wellbeing.

This report explores the disconnect between this growing population and its low involvement in civic, voting and political life, as well as the underlying issues of poverty, unemployment, education, homeownership and other social indicators that may contribute to this lack of civic engagement.

Methodology and Acknowledgements

Portions of this report concerning local government representatives are drawn from data maintained by GrassrootsLab, LLC, a California based consulting firm specializing in local government, advocacy, data and technology. Grassfire, the firm's proprietary database, contains unique data on local governments in California, including cities, counties and schools, as well as information surrounding their governance structures and jurisdictions.

Data regarding ethnicity of elected officials was augmented and verified by records maintained by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) from 2014 and based on officeholders as of January 2015.

Population estimates and characteristics including homeownership, unemployment and poverty rates utilize the U.S Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) five year estimates for 2013.

Education Enrollment and Dropout statistics reference grades 9-12 and are drawn from the California Department of Education Data Reporting Office and Demographics Unit. Dropout rates reference the 1-year Rate Formula.

Information regarding voter participation rates and turnout was extracted from University of California, Davis California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP), which is a non-partisan civic engagement research and outreach initiative, founded and directed by Mindy Romero.

The California Latino Prosperity Index

The Index examines six key indicators of civic participation and well-being to assess each county's overall ranking.

- Latino Registered Voter Turnout (2012 Presidential)
- Latino Representation in local elected office (City, County, School)
- Latino High School Dropout Rate
- Latino Unemployment Rate
- Latino Poverty Rate
- Latino Homeownership Rate

The Index averages each county's overall rank across all categories, ascribing equal weight to each. The Index focuses on 37 California counties with significant Latino populations, excluding the 21 with less than 20 percent overall Latino residents.

Key Findings

Poverty is the Strongest Corollary to Voter Turnout

Utilizing this ranking system, it is clear that counties that demonstrate the lowest rates of Latino poverty tend to have high rates of Latino voter turnout. In fact, San Benito County is the only county with a top-ranking (low) poverty rate that does not fall into the top third of counties when it comes to Latino voter turnout. On the flip side, Sacramento County stands out as the only county in the state where Latino voter turnout ranks among the top third in the state despite a mid-range poverty rate.

No One Indicator Ensures Latino Prosperity

Each county has unique strengths and challenges and no county scores in the top third—or bottom third—across all indicators in the Index. For example, top ranking Ventura County is strong in all areas except its high school dropout rate. Whereas Yuba County, at the bottom of the Index, struggles in several areas, but has relatively strong homeownership numbers.

Latino Majority Counties Fare Worse Than Their Counterparts

Eleven California counties hold Latino majority populations. These counties hold an average rank of 21 in the index, and only Monterey, Imperial and San Benito figure in the top 10.

Bay Area Counties Top the Prosperity Index

Increasingly the state's most affluent region, the Bay Area holds two of the top three and four of the top 10 slots on the Index. No Bay Area county included in the survey finishes below the upper third in overall rankings. That being said, none of the Bay Area counties rank in the top third of counties for Latino elected representation, with 5 of the 7 ranking among the lowest in the state. Several Bay Area Counties also rank at or near the bottom in Latino homeownership.

Mono County: A Study in Duality

21st ranked Mono County boasts a low unemployment rate as well as the lowest poverty rate and highest voter turnout for Latinos in the state, but is at the bottom of rankings for high school dropout rate. This extreme example illustrates the complex regional factors required to understand the social and economic challenges facing Latinos in California.

The California Latino Prosperity Index

Upper Third

Middle Third

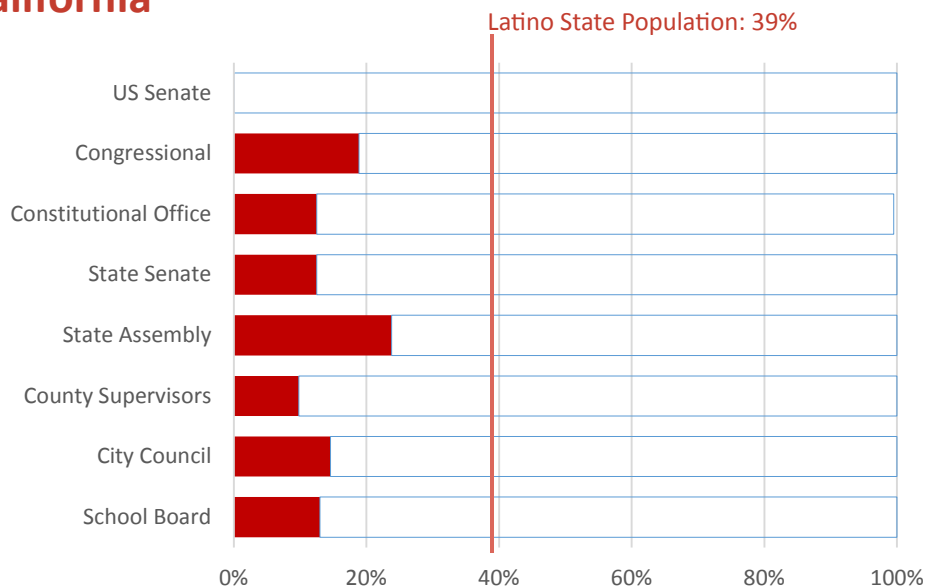
Bottom Third

County	Overall Rank	Ranked High to Low			Ranked Low to High		
		Latino Registered Voter Turnout	Latino home ownership	Latino local elected Representation	Latino HS Dropout	Latino Unemployment	Latino Poverty
Ventura	1	11	9	11	17(T)	6	10
Contra Costa	2	5	8	28	10(T)	10(T)	7
San Mateo	3	4	34	27	3(T)	4	2
San Benito	4	18	7	7	7	32	5
Napa	5	10	28	20	15	5	4
Santa Barbara	6	6	35	13	17(T)	7	17
Alameda	7(T)	9	23	26	20	13	6
Monterey	7(T)	21	31	4	2	18(T)	21
Imperial	9	31	5	2	1	34	26
Santa Cruz	10(T)	15	33	22	3(T)	10(T)	18
Yolo	10(T)	27	22	9	7(T)	20	16
Colusa	12	8	15	30	17 (T)	30	3
San Luis Obispo	13	13	36	34	5(T)	3	15
Inyo	14(T)	7	18	35	37	1(T)	9
Riverside	14(T)	33	1	17	10(T)	27	19
Santa Clara	14(T)	3	27	18	35	16	8
San Diego	17(T)	14	26	19	21(T)	14	14
Solano	17(T)	17	6	33	23(T)	18(T)	11
San Bernardino	19	25	2	10	28(T)	24	20
Orange	20	28	24	24	13(T)	8	13
Mono	21	1	37	35	36	1(T)	1
Sonoma	22	2	32	29	28(T)	10(T)	12
Los Angeles	23	24	30	5	23(T)	15	23
Glenn	24	23	4	21	31	21	22
Madera	25	22	13	15	32	9	31
Tulare	26	29	14	3	13(T)	30	36
Kern	27	34	10	6	23(T)	23	33
San Joaquin	28	19	16	23	16	33	24
Sacramento	29	12	19	16	33	25	27
Merced	30	35	17	8	5(T)	34	35
Tehama	31	20	3	31	30	22	29
Sutter	32	16	25	32	10(T)	28	28
Fresno	33	36	21	1	23(T)	26	37
Mendocino	34	26	29	35	7(T)	17	34
Kings	35	37	20	12	23(T)	28	32
Stanislaus	36	30	11	25	21(T)	36	30
Yuba	37	32	12	14	34	37	25

(T) denotes a tie

Latino Representation in California

Latinos have struggled to attain elected parity since California achieved statehood more than 150 years ago. In 1875, California still had a Latino governor, but for the next 100 years there was virtually no Latino representation in California politics. Despite an influx of immigrants to California from the western United States, the requirement of an English literacy test in 1894 made Latino visibility shrink. The repeal of the literacy test in 1965, along with the Civil Rights and Chicano movements in the middle of the 20th Century, stimulated the number of Latinos in elected positions.



From 1980 to 2010 the Latino population in California ballooned, and with it, Latino political representation began to swell. In those 30 years, California's total population increased by 57 percent, and the total Latino population increased by more than 200 percent.

As a result, the 21st Century has seen a surge in the number of Latino elected officials in the California State Legislature. There have been 63 Latinos in the State Assembly and 20 Latino State Senators since 2000, nearly three times the total amount of Latino state officials since the state's inception.

In 2015 Alex Padilla became the first Latino elected to Secretary of State of California and Anthony Rendon (D-Lakewood) was chosen to be the next Speaker of the California State Assembly. As of 2016, both top legislative leaders in California will be Democratic Latinos from Los Angeles County—the other being Senate pro Tempore Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), who is also the first Latino in 130 years to hold the office.

State and Federal Representation

Of the current 120 members in the California Legislature, there are 23 members who have been identified as Latino—5 Senators and 18 Assembly Members—a historically high number that is, however, a slight decline from the early 2000's. In the U.S. House of Representatives 10 of 53 California members are Latino. This is the most Latino congressional members of any state, and comprises nearly one third of all Latino congressional members nationwide.

What accounts for the wide discrepancy between Latino population and its representation at the highest levels of government? While voter participation and economic well-being do play a role in the overall lack of representation, it is vital to examine the extent to which a systemic lack of representation is inhibiting the success of Latinos at higher levels of office. Historically, local government office, including school boards, city councils and county boards of supervisors, has proven the most reliable pathway to these higher offices.

Overall, around 50 percent of all state and federal officeholders in California—including more than two-thirds of the State Assembly—held a local government elected position at one point in time prior to his or her election to higher office. Latino officeholders reflect similar rates of local government experience, suggesting an increase in local representation will help build a bench of future state and federal officeholders.

Latino Representation in California

Cities and Counties

By the Numbers

If local government is indeed the ladder to higher office, then the likelihood of an increase in the proportion of Latinos serving in State and Federal seats in California is bleak.

Across the state, merely 14.7 percent of municipal and 10.1 percent of county supervisorial seats are currently held by Latinos. Furthermore, fully 27 counties have no Latino representation in their municipalities.

Of the 9 counties with a Latino majority population in California, only Fresno has an elected Latino representation close to its population. On the flip side, Colusa County boasts a Latino population of 55 percent, but has no elected Latino city, county or state representatives within county borders.

Key Findings

Population is a Key Driver of Representation... But not of Governing Majorities...

There are 124 cities with 50 percent or more Latino Population. Sixty-nine percent of Latino reps come from cities that are 50 percent or more Latino. Eighty-nine of these (72 percent) have at least one Latino, just 49 (39 percent) have a Latino majority.

... Nor is it a Guarantee.

Only Fresno County has a Latino majority among its mayors and councilmembers. Colusa County, with a 55.1 percent Latino population, has no elected officials on either of its city councils, nor is it represented by a Latino at the county, state or federal level. Just 2 of 25 school board members are Latino.

Small Cities Drive Latino Representation.

Over half of Latino local electeds come from cities with less than 40,000 residents. 72 percent of all Latino elected officials sit on council seats in cities with an overall population of under 75,000.

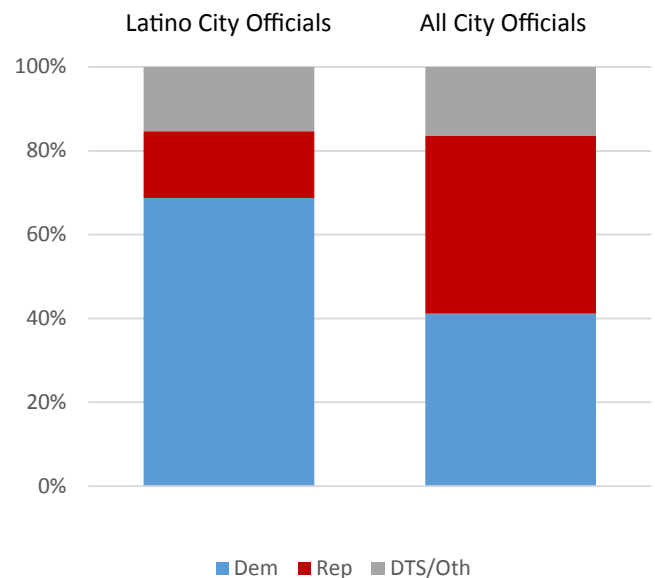
Central Valley Leads in Representation.

Regionally, the San Joaquin Valley performs best, though average Latino representation is only 25 percent, vs 33 percent of the population. In the Bay Area, Latinos are 19 percent of the population, just 7 percent of local representatives.

A Closer Look: Party Affiliations

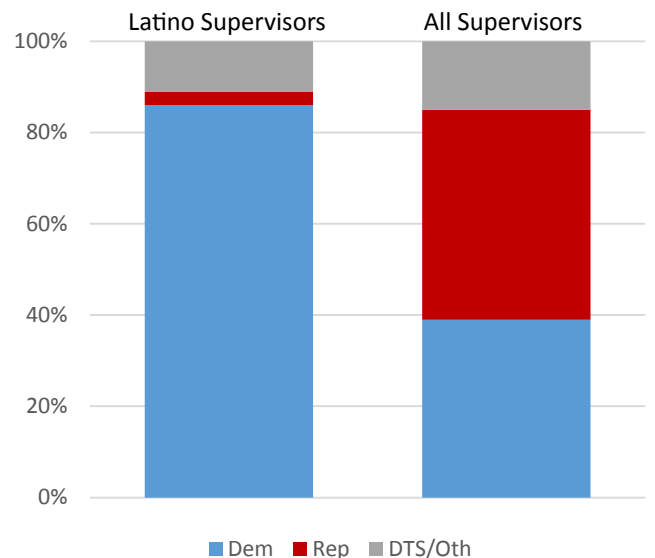
An overwhelming majority of Latino city elected officials identify as Democrat. Of the 28 counties with Latino representation, 25 of them contain a majority of Latino Democrats. There are only two counties that have a majority of Latino Republicans on city councils, San Benito and Ventura.

Party Affiliations: City Officials



At the county level, the disparity is extreme. Research for this report revealed just one Latino Republican County Supervisor, John Vasquez of Solano County. This despite Republicans holding a plurality of county supervisor seats across the state.

Party Affiliations: County Supervisors



Latino Representation in California

School Districts By the Numbers

As of January 2015, there were 4,987 school board members serving on a total of 992 school districts, which include County Boards of Education, Elementary School Districts, High School Districts, and Unified School Districts.

Of this group, only 13.5 percent (671) of board members are Latino.

Despite a small overall representation, 97 school districts—nearly 10 percent—have a majority Latino representation and 17 of these districts have all-Latino school boards. The three counties with the highest representation of Latino school board members are Imperial (42 percent), Fresno (37 percent) and Tulare (31 percent). Imperial and Tulare also have by far the highest proportion of Latino population, at 81 percent and 61 percent, respectively, suggesting the prevalence of elected officials in this instance is related to high population numbers.

Representation Does Not Match Enrollment

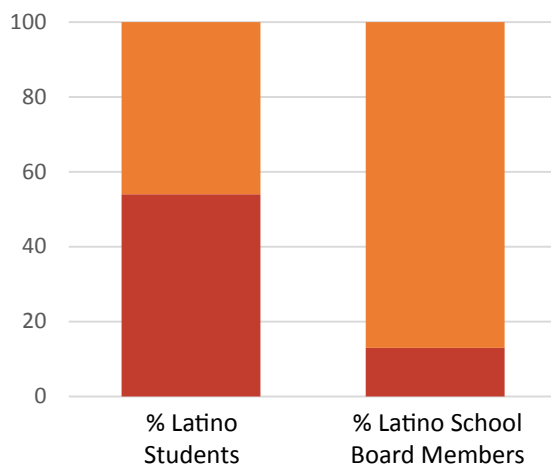
Latinos are underrepresented at school districts across the state, at an alarming rate. Nearly 54 percent of the 6.2 million students are Latino, but data shows only 13 percent of local school board members identify as such and in no county do elected school representatives match remotely close with enrollment figures.

Imperial County has the highest level of Latino representatives in the state (42 percent), but 91 percent of its student population is Latino. Los Angeles County has the highest number of Latino board members with 110. However, that equates to just 26 percent of total board members despite a Latino student enrollment figure of 65 percent.

Poorly Represented Students Demonstrate Higher Dropout Rates

Inyo county is the only county with more than 50 percent Hispanic students and yet no school board representation. Mono County also has over 50 percent Latino student enrollment and just one Latino member. Notably, the dropout rates in these counties are the two highest in the state.

Statewide Representation vs Enrollment



A Closer Look: Latinas in Local Elected Office

From a gender perspective, Latinas fare better in holding elected office in California than women of other ethnicities. The Leadership California Institute report “Women: 2014” found Latinas were 14 percent of all city officials, versus 3 percent for African American and Asian/Pacific Islander, respectively.

At the municipal level, more than one-third of Latino city officials are female, versus just 29 percent of overall female city elected officials. But at the county level, Latinas hold just six offices overall, which is 20 percent of all Latino County Supervisors.

Latinas, and females in general, are better represented at the school district level than any other level of government. Overall, females account for 48.3 percent of school board members and nearly half of Latino school officials (49.3 percent) are Latina. Lost Hills Union Elementary in Kern county is an all-Latina school board.

Political Participation

The imbalance between Latino voters and other ethnic groups in California is well known. To cite one study, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) in August 2015 noted that “whites make up only 43 percent of California’s adult population but 60 percent of the state’s likely voters. In contrast, Latinos comprise 34 percent of the adult population but just 18 percent of likely voters.”¹

This tracks a national trend of Latinos registering and voting in smaller numbers than other groups. Census records from 2014, visualized at right, show that California Latinos slightly trail Latinos nationally, with registration numbers in the low thirties, and voting in the high teens.

Using a 12 year average of voter registration and turnout, Latinos have constituted just 17.6 percent of registered voters, and 14.7 percent of the average electorate in California.²

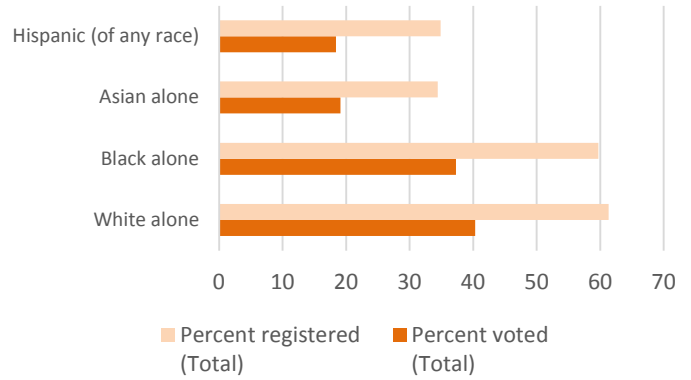
This disadvantages Latino candidates in both state and local elections, although research for this report has identified that even relatively high Latino voter participation does not automatically translate to higher representation.

Examining figures for California counties in which Latinos comprise at least 20 percent of registered voters, it is clear that Latino representation at the local level lags voter participation with very few exceptions (see below).

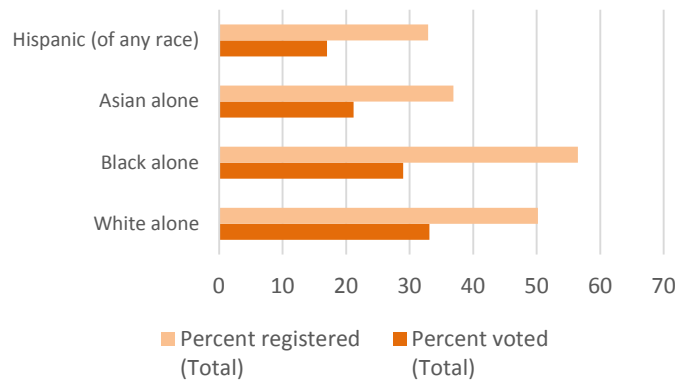
A notable example is Imperial County, where Latinos are roughly 55 percent of the electorate, but hold just 40 percent of local seats. Alternatively, Latinos in Fresno average just 21 percent of voter turnout, but hold 41 percent of local elected seats. Also notable, Los Angeles County, where off-cycle contests are the norm, is among the few counties where representation over-performs voter participation.

The disconnect between already-low voter engagement of the Latino community and its extremely low representation in these local offices raises new questions about efforts to promote Latino candidates and engage the community.

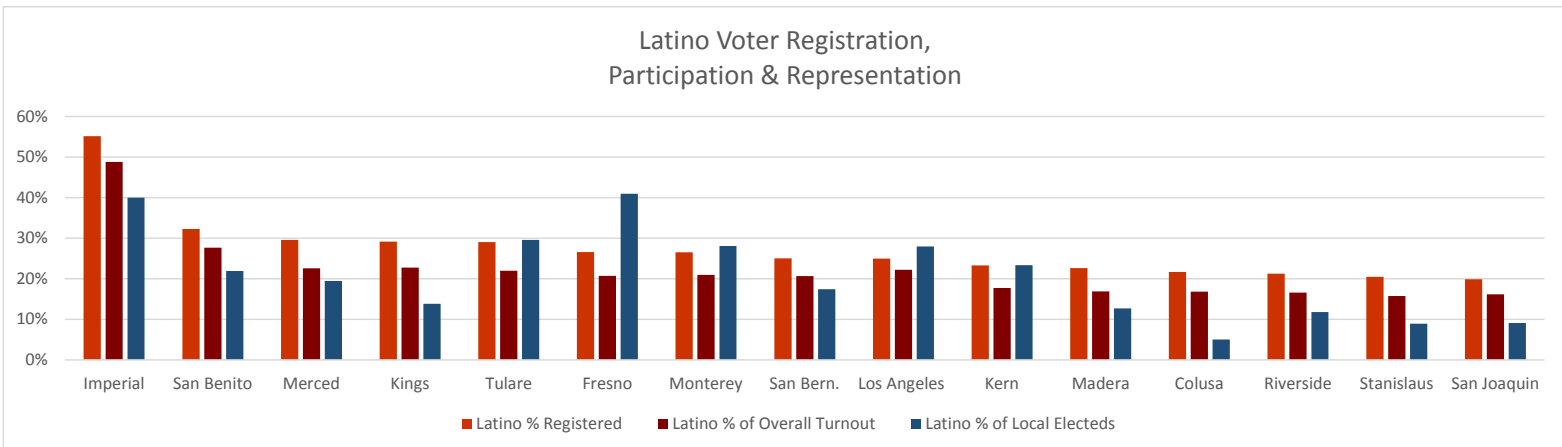
Voter Registration and Turnout: National 2014



Voter Registration and Turnout: California 2014



Source: US Census: Reported Voting and Registration, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, for States: November 2014



¹ PPIC “California’s Likely Voters” http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=255 (Aug 2015)

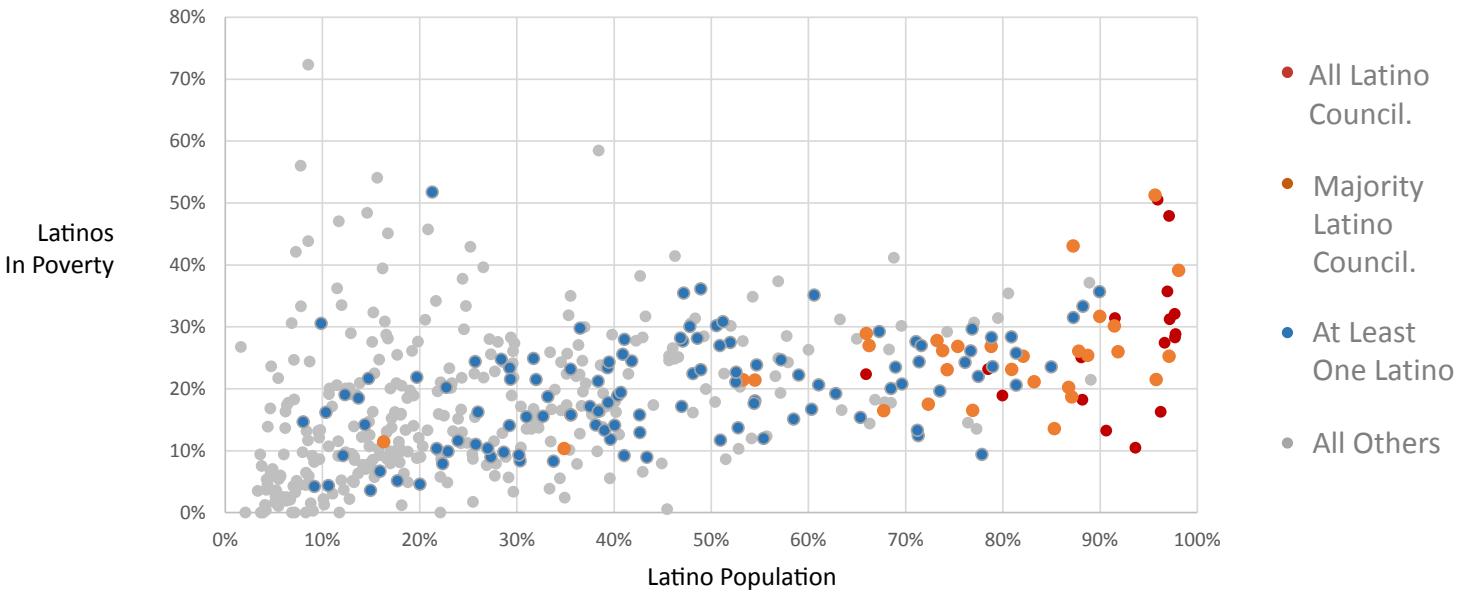
² Average drawn from statistics in UC Davis Center for Regional Change California Voter Registration and Voter Turnout Tracking 2002 - 2014

Prosperity Indicators

Poverty

As seen in the Latino Prosperity Index, poverty is perhaps the strongest predictor of Latino representation, and the striking rates of Latino poverty in California are a clear impediment to growing the ranks of Latino elected officials. Stanford’s Center on Poverty and Inequality reported the Hispanic poverty rate in their California Poverty Measure at 32.2 percent, 12 points higher than any other ethnic group and 10 points above their statewide figure.³

City Councils in California



As the figure above demonstrates, cities with high Latino impoverishment are less likely to see representation in local government. Latino representation increases as the Latino population increases, but it is demonstrably held down by any rise in poverty rate among the Latino community.

Sixty cities have a Latino poverty rate above 30 percent. Only 20 of these have any Latino on the city council—and 14 of these are at least 85 percent Latino residents.

Indeed, there are no cities with a Latino majority council where the Latino poverty rate is above 30 percent—unless the city population is at least 85 percent Latino overall. Councils that are all Latino are confined to cities that have at least an 80 percent Latino population.

Top 10 Counties

County	Rank	Latino Poverty Rate
Mono	1	12.05 %
San Mateo	2	12.97 %
Colusa	3	14.25 %
Napa	4	14.34 %
San Benito	5	15.39 %
Alameda	6	16.76 %
Contra Costa	7	16.91 %
Santa Clara	8	17.62 %
Inyo	9	17.78 %
Ventura	10	18.07 %

*Among Counties with at least 20% Latino Population

³Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality “A Portrait of Poverty within California Counties and Demographic Groups” Christopher Wimer, Marybeth Mattingly, Matt Levin, Caroline Danielson, and Sarah Bohn (2014)

Unemployment

Latino unemployment mirrors unemployment trends across the state, with inland, rural areas seeing higher rates of joblessness. Notably, Latino unemployment rates lag the general population in nearly every county in California. On average, Latino unemployment is 1.8 percent higher across the state’s 58 counties, and the only eight counties where Latinos fare better than the general population lay north of Sacramento or in the Eastern Sierra.

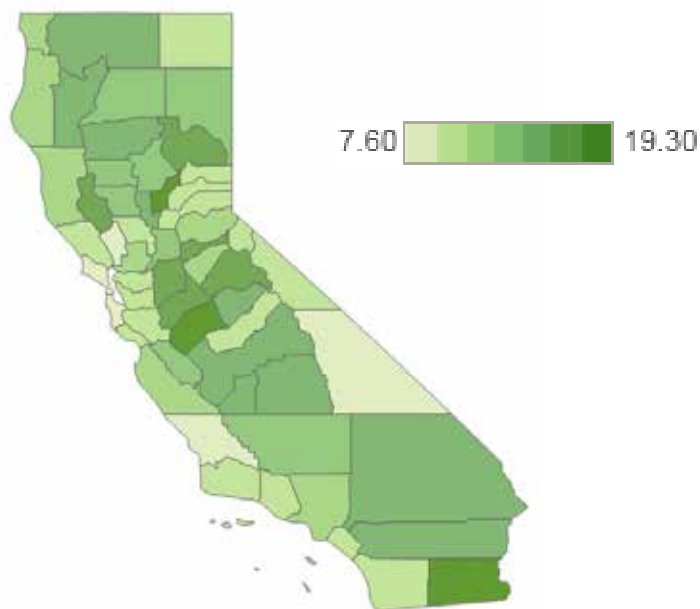
More than 300 cities see Latino unemployment higher than the general population, and more than 50 municipalities show Latino unemployment at least 5 percent higher. Among these 53 cities, there are only four elected Latino city officials.

Lowest Latino Unemployment Rate by County

County	Latino Unemployment	Rank
Mono	7.7 %	T1
Inyo	7.7 %	T1
San Luis Obispo	9.3 %	3
San Mateo	9.5 %	4
Napa	10.3 %	5
Ventura	10.6 %	6
Santa Barbara	10.7 %	7
Orange	10.8 %	8
Madera	11.2 %	9
Santa Cruz	11.5 %	T10
Contra Costa	11.5 %	T10
Sonoma	11.5 %	T10

*Among Counties with at least 20% Latino Population

County by County Latino Unemployment Rate



Source: American Community Survey, 2013 5-year Estimates, Unemployment rate; Estimate; Hispanic or Latino origin

Education

The statewide grade 9-12 dropout rate in California is 3.1 percent overall, 3.8 percent for Latino students—twice that of White students. In Imperial County, however, the overall dropout rate is 1.4 percent and for Latinos it is 1.3 percent, the lowest dropout rate for Latinos in the state and one of only three (Glenn, Kings) where the Latino dropout rate is lower than the county average. Of the 21 counties with more than 50 percent Latino enrollment, Imperial has the highest graduation rate at 92 percent.

Conversely, the dropout rate in Mono County is 49.4 percent overall and 56.6 percent for Latino students, more than twice that of White students. More troubling, the dropout rate in Inyo County is 53.3 percent overall and 59.5 percent among Latino students, and just 9.4 percent for White students.

Lowest Latino Dropout Rate by County

County	Latino HS Dropout Rate	Rank
Imperial	1.3 %	1
Monterey	2.4 %	2
San Mateo	2.5 %	T3
Santa Cruz	2.5 %	T3
San Luis Obispo	2.6 %	T5
Merced	2.6 %	T5
Mendocino	2.7 %	T7
Yolo	2.7 %	T7
San Benito	2.7 %	T7
Contra Costa	2.9 %	T10
Riverside	2.9 %	T10
Sutter	2.9 %	T10

*Among Counties with at least 20% Latino Population

Source: California Department of Education, Data Reporting Office, Dropouts by Ethnic Designation, 2013-14 State of California, For All Students

Homeownership

Latinos occupy slightly more than a quarter of all California households (27 percent) and comprise just over one-fifth (22 percent) of all homeowners. Fewer than half—46 percent—of Latino households are owner-occupied. In comparison, 57 percent of all California households statewide are owner-occupied.⁵

Interestingly, some of the counties with the highest rates of homeownership are also home to some of the highest rates of unemployment among Latinos. Riverside County, for instance, is the only county that matches the state homeownership proportion, with nearly 58 percent. At the same time, of the 37 counties with a Latino population above 20 percent, Riverside has the 11th highest rate of unemployment and 19th highest rate of poverty among Latinos.

Overall, although homeownership is by nature a sign of economic wellbeing, it cannot be directly tied to an increase in civic engagement nor may it automatically result in a higher rate of ethnic representation. Despite a significantly larger number of Latino homeowners, Riverside boasts a mid-range proportion of Latino elected officials at nearly 12 percent.

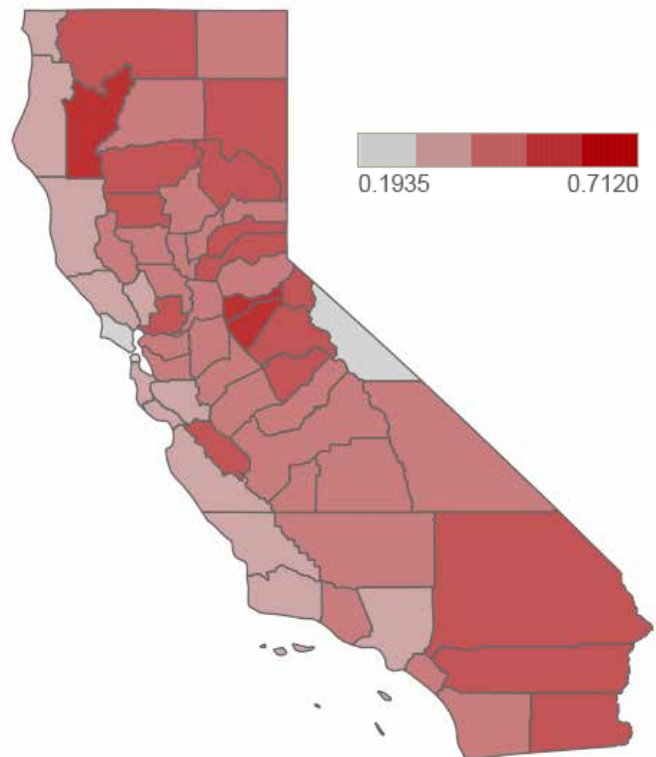
**Highest Latino Homeownership Rate
by County**

County	Latino home ownership	Rank
Riverside	57.98 %	1
San Bernardino	56.45 %	2
Tehama	54.90 %	3
Glenn	53.48 %	4
Imperial	52.34 %	5
Solano	51.71 %	6
San Benito	50.68 %	7
Contra Costa	50.30 %	8
Ventura	49.84 %	9
Kern	49.61 %	10

*Among Counties with at least 20% Latino Population

Source: American Community Survey, 2013 5-year Estimates,
Tenure Hispanic or Latino Householder

County by County Latino Homeownership Rate



⁵ A Statistical Picture of Latinos in California, California Senate Office of Research (2014)

Takeaways/Looking Ahead

Latinos are Underrepresented in California Government at Every Level

By any measure, Latinos are under-represented in every level of government in California. Without a significant change in the current trend, California's largest ethnic group will be underrepresented for the foreseeable future.

Poverty is the Strongest Corollary to Voter Turnout

The counties that demonstrate the lowest rates of Latino poverty tend to have high rates of Latino voter turnout. In fact, San Benito County is the only county with a top-ranking (low) poverty rate that does not fall into the top third of counties when it comes to Latino voter turnout. On the flip side, Sacramento County stands out as the only county in the state where Latino voter turnout ranks among the top third in the state despite a mid-range poverty rate.

High Latino Turnout Does Not Guarantee Local Representation—But it Helps.

Even in counties where Latinos represent 20-25 percent of the electorate, local communities are not represented by Latino mayors and councilmembers.

No One Indicator Ensures Latino Prosperity

Each county has unique strengths and challenges and no county scores in the top—or bottom—third across all indicators in the index. For example, top ranking Ventura County is strong in all areas except its high school dropout rate, whereas Yuba County, at the bottom of the Index, struggles in several areas, but has relatively strong homeownership numbers.

Poor Latino Communities Do Not Foster Elected Leadership

Poverty has long been one of the key indicators for diminished civic engagement and voter turnout regardless of race and ethnicity. This problem disproportionately affects Latino communities in California and is manifesting itself in alarmingly low voter turnout rates.

Latinas Fare Better Than Women of Other Ethnicities

The prominent role of women in Latino civic engagement, political decision making, and voting behavior is well documented and appears to be a model for women seeking office.

Latinos Fare Best in Small Cities

Small cities lead the way in Latino representation, but more needs to be done in medium to large cities to bring representation levels to population parity.