



PHOTO: OLGA LOPEZ

THE LATINO ELECTORATE IN ILLINOIS: Demographics, Participation, and the Path to Greater Political Power

By Carlos Lopez & Noreen Sugrue

Latinos can influence and even determine electoral outcomes. But this will only happen if Latinos show up at the polls and vote. This brief offers a snapshot of Latino voters in Illinois. How many are there, how old are they, what is the rate of voter turnout, and what are some possible reasons for the voter turnout rate and, more broadly, for the state of the Latino electorate in Illinois?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau:

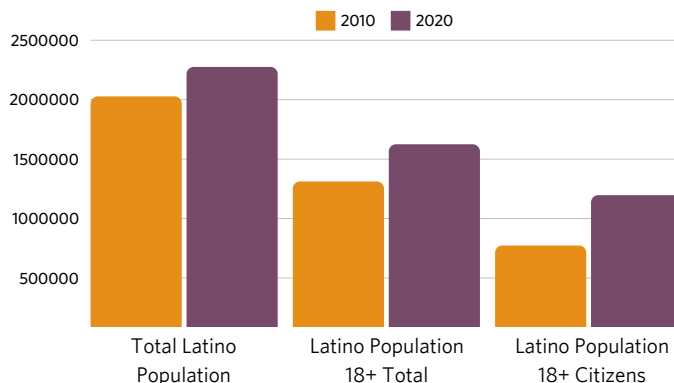
- There are approximately 9,050,700 eligible voters in Illinois.
 - Approximately 13%, or nearly 1.2 million, of those eligible to vote in Illinois are Latino.
- In Illinois, there are 1,624,976 Latinos over 18.
 - Of those, 1,196,655, or about 74%, are eligible to vote.

Between 2010 and 2022, Illinois' total Latino population increased. The Latino population aged 18 and older also increased, as did the number of Latino citizens 18 and older. In short, between 2010 and 2022, there was a discernible growth not only in the total Latino population but also in the Latino voting population.

This increase in the 18-and-older Latino population is projected to continue since more than 30,000 Latinos in Illinois turn 18 annually¹.

Latino Population: Total, Total 18 Years and Older, and Total 18 Years and Older Who Are Citizens, Illinois, 2010, 2020

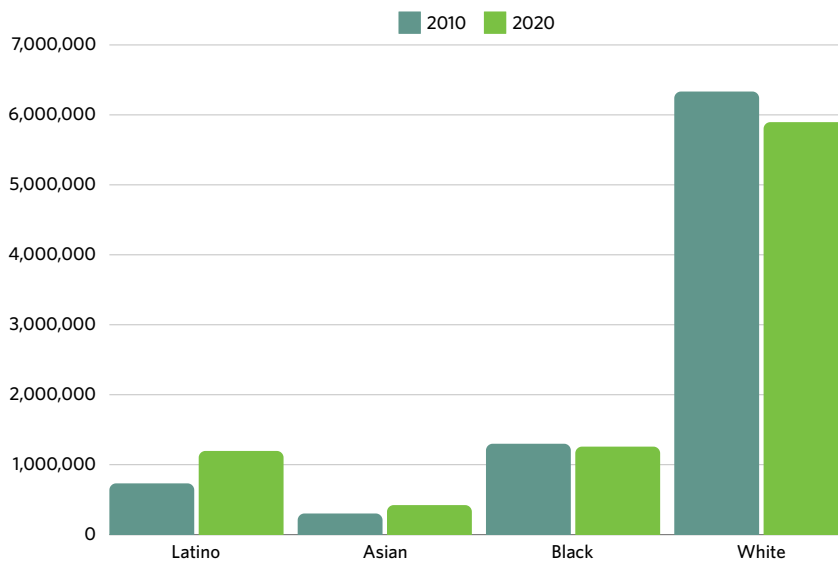
Source: U.S. Census 2010, ACS 2022



- In 2010, 65% of Latinos were 18 or older; by 2022, 71% were over 18.
- In 2010, 38% of Latinos 18 or older were citizens; by 2022, that percentage was 53.

Change Between 2010 and 2020 in the Number of Eligible Voter by Select Race/Ethnicity, Illinois

Source: U.S. Census 2010 and 2022

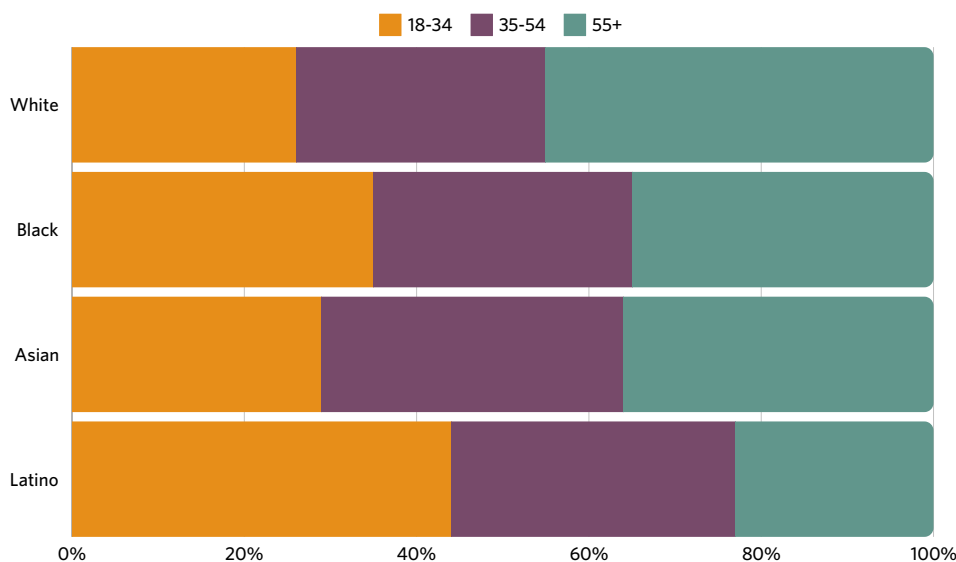


- Between 2010 and 2022, the number of eligible Latino and Asian voters increased, while the number of eligible Black and White voters decreased.
 - Specifically, Latinos increased by more than 423,000, and Asians by about 41,000. Whites decreased by over 437,000 and Blacks by about 41,000.

In 2022, Latino voters in Illinois are clustered in the under-55 age group, especially those younger than 35. When comparing the age distribution of Latino, Black, White, and Asian voters in Illinois, Latinos have the most significant percentage of their voters who are under 55. In contrast, Whites have the most significant percentage of their voters in the over-55 group.

Percent of Eligible Voters 18-34, 55 and Older for Select Racial/Ethnic Groups, Illinois, 2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



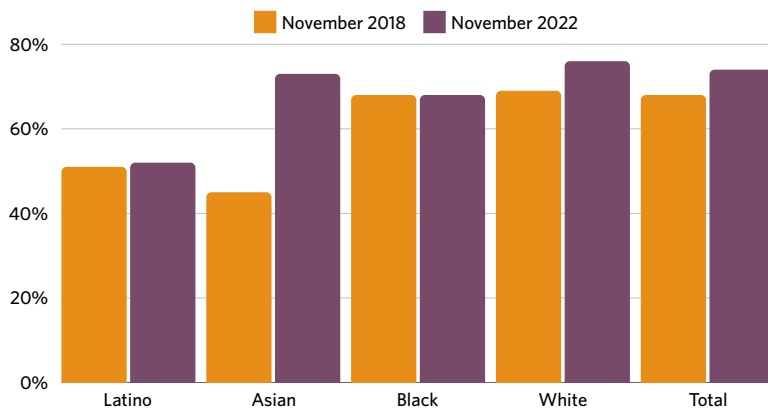
- Nearly 75% of Latino voters are under the age of 55, and almost half of White voters are 55 and older.

However, eligibility is not the same as registering to vote or voting, and Latino political strength and influence, while potentially tremendous, are expressed commensurately with voter turnout.

In the 2022 election, approximately 77% of registered Latino voters in Illinois cast a ballot. This suggests that increasing Latino voter registration has the potential to dramatically increase Latino political influence in Illinois.

Percent of Voter Eligible Population Registered to Vote, Select Race/Ethnicity, Illinois, November 2018 and November 2022

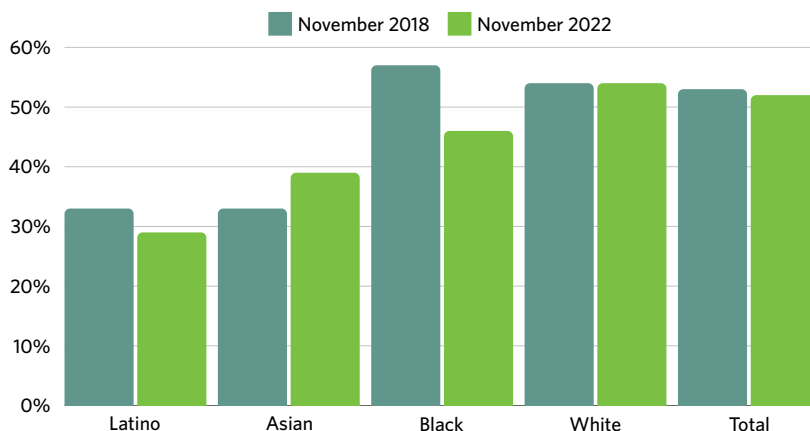
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2018 and 2022; [Voting Registration Tables, Table 4b](#)



- As of November 2022, Latinos have the lowest percentage of eligible voters registered to vote, although there was a slight increase for Latinos between 2018 and 2022.

Percent of Voter Eligible Population Who Voted, Select Race/Ethnicity, Illinois, November 2018 and November 2022

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2018 and 2022; [Voting Registration Tables, Table 4b](#)



- When comparing the percentages of total voter turnout among racial/ethnic groups, we find that Latino turnout is the lowest. Also, as the chart indicates, the percentage of Latinos and Blacks who voted declined between 2018 and 2022.

SUMMARY OF DATA ANALYSIS

For the first time, more than half, or about 53%, of Illinois' adult Latino population are citizens.

The number of eligible Latino and Asian voters is increasing while the number of eligible Black and White voters is decreasing. This growth in eligible Latino voters will continue since more than 30,000 Latinos in Illinois turn 18 annually, and 98% are citizens.

However, only about half of eligible Latino voters are registered, and fewer than a third of eligible Latino voters actually voted in the 2022 election. The 2022 turnout among Latinos in Illinois represents a decline from the proportion of eligible Latino voters who voted in the 2018 election.

LOW VOTER TURNOUT AMONG LATINOS: SOME CONSIDERATIONS

The less than robust voter turnout among Latinos and, therefore, a muted Latino political voice translates into diluted political influence and power. But even more concerning is that the Latino community is not affecting policy or resource allocation choices commensurate with their numbers and contributions to the nation's social and economic life and the cities and states where they work and live. For example, in the 2023 Chicago mayoral election, about 21% of registered Latino voters went to the polls, compared to approximately 61% of White registered voters. Because of the population distribution in Chicago, this discrepancy in voter turnout enhanced the impact of White political and policy preferences and diluted those of Latinos.

Young Voters Have Lower Voter Turnout

It is important to note that in Illinois, as is the case across the US, the Latino population skews young. With almost 50% of eligible Latino voters in Illinois under the age of 35, relatively low voter turnout for Latinos is not surprising. Young Latino voters behave like all young voters, turning out when issues are perceived as essential to their daily lives, candidates speak to their concerns, and voting is made easy.

Need for Greater Voter Outreach

Both political parties and almost all political candidates are anxious to capture the Latino vote, but according to Latino voters in Illinois, the actions of many candidates often fail to do the work needed to "capture their vote." Recent survey data indicate that nearly 50% of eligible Latino voters were never contacted by campaigns and did not believe candidates were speaking to them.

Limited Media Spending

At the same time, during the 2022 election cycle, there were significant expenditures on media by campaigns within Illinois. According to Telemundo, in the Chicago DMA², \$152 million was spent in the English language market and \$1.5 million in the Spanish language market. This amounts to a spending ratio of slightly more than 100 to 1.

Speaking to the Issues That Matter to Latinos

Finally, identifying issues that matter most to Latino voters is essential. For too long, many political pundits and leaders have assumed that immigration is the issue that wins Latino votes. While that issue is important nationally and in Illinois, it ranks far below the so-called kitchen table issues (e.g., housing costs, jobs, health care, education). According to Professor Jaime Dominguez of Northwestern University, Latinos, like all voters, want political leaders and candidates to focus on “kitchen table issues.” An essential step in getting Latinos to the polls is to reach them, talk with them, and describe how specific policies will improve their daily lives and the opportunities for their children.

CONCLUSION

Motivating Latino voters, especially young Latino voters, requires targeted efforts. Addressing this is incumbent on Latino community members; however, it also requires that candidates develop and implement robust outreach strategies for campaigns that target Latino voters and invest in media aimed at Latinos.

¹ This approximate number was statistically derived from national data on the increase in the Latino population turning 18 every year.

² The Chicago DMA, or media market, comprises of 16 counties - 11 in Illinois and 5 in Indiana. As of 2024, the Chicago DMA is the number 3 Designated Market Area in the United States, as ranked by Nielsen, with a TV household population of 3,463,060.

ABOUT SOL

Statistics on Latinos (SOL) is a series of periodic policy briefs that combine data with insightful analysis from the Latino Policy Forum. The series will provide a unique snapshot of the growth, influence, and challenges of the local Latino community, for use by community leaders, urban planners, elected officials, journalists, and anyone interested in building a shared future for all of Illinois.

Authors
Carlos Lopez
Noreen Sugrue

Editor
Graciela González

Format and Design
Graciela González
Jermaine Smith, Sr.

President & CEO
Sylvia Puente

Latino Policy Forum
180 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1250
Chicago, IL 60601
312-376-1766 (tel)
www.latinopolicyforum.org