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A Record 24 Million Latinos Are Eligible to Vote, But Turnout Rate Has Lagged That of Whites, Blacks

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About the Pew Hispanic Center

The Pew Hispanic Center is a nonpartisan research organization that seeks to improve public understanding of the diverse Hispanic population in the United States and to chronicle Latinos' growing impact on the nation. It does not take positions on policy issues. The Center is part of the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" based in Washington, D.C., and it is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, a Philadelphia-based public charity. All of the Center's reports are available at www.pewhispanic.org.

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About This Report

This report explores trends in Latino voter participation in U.S. presidential elections. It also examines the geographic distribution of Latino voters across the U.S.

The data for this report are derived from three main sources. The first is the November Voting and Registration Supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS is a monthly survey of about 55,000 households conducted by the Census Bureau for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The CPS is representative of the non-institutionalized population of the U.S. It does not include data on the voting behavior of enlisted military personnel and those who are institutionalized. The November Voting and Registration Supplement of the CPS is one of the richest sources of information available about the characteristics of voters. It is conducted after Election Day and relies on survey respondent self-reports of voting and voter registration. In addition to the November Voting and Registration Supplement to the Current Population Survey, this report also uses the August 2012 Current Population Survey.

The second data source is the 2010 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS). The 2010 provides detailed geographic, demographic and economic characteristics for Latino and non-Latino eligible voters and is the main source for the state-level analysis of this report.

Voter registration data for Latino voters in the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia and North Carolina are from voter registration statistics published by each state.

Accompanying this report are [state profiles](#) of Latino eligible voters in 41 states and the District of Columbia.¹ Also accompanying this report is an [interactive map](#) showing key characteristics of Latino voters in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

This report was written by Mark Hugo Lopez. Analysis for the report was provided by Seth Motel and Eileen Patten. Motel and Patten wrote the state fact sheet reports. Paul Taylor provided editorial guidance and comments. Jeffrey Passel and Rakesh Kochhar provided comments. Antonio Rodriguez provided research assistance. Eileen Patten number-checked the report. Bruce Drake was the copy editor.

¹ There are nine states whose Hispanic eligible voter samples (U.S. citizens, ages 18 and older) in the 2010 American Community Survey are not large enough to generate reliable estimates for the profiles: Alaska, Delaware, Maine, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and West Virginia.

A Note on Terminology

The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably in this report.

References to other races and ethnicities are to the non-Hispanic components of those populations. “Asian” does not include Pacific Islanders.

“Eligible voters” refers to persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens.

For findings based on CPS data, “registered voters” refers to persons who self-report that they are registered to vote in the November Voting and Registration Supplement of the CPS.

For findings based on state voter registration data, “registered voters” refers to tallies of registered voters reported by state election officials.

“Voters” are those who say they voted in the Voting and Registration Supplement of the CPS.

“Voter turnout rate” is the share of eligible voters who say they voted.

“Battleground states” were identified by the Pew Research Center using state ratings in September from The Cook Political Report, MSNBC, The New York Times, Real Clear Politics, Karl Rove, CNN, Pollster.com and the Washington Post.

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Trends in Latino Voter Participation

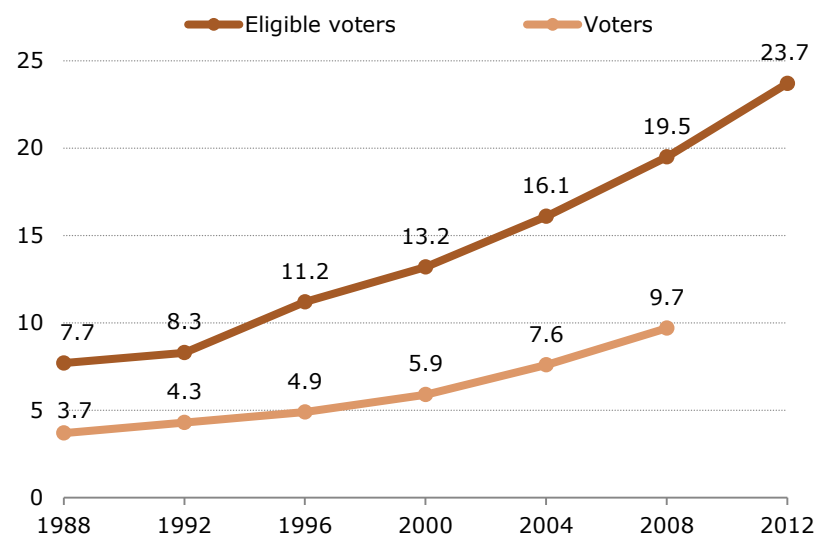
A record 23.7 million Latinos are eligible to vote in the 2012 presidential election, according to an analysis of Census Bureau data by the Pew Hispanic Center, a project of the Pew Research Center. This is up by more than 4 million, or 22%, since 2008, when 19.5 million Latinos were eligible to vote.²

Due to their ongoing population growth, Latinos comprise a greater share of the nation's eligible voters than they did just a few years ago—11.0% this year, up from 9.5% in 2008 and 8.2% in 2004 ([Lopez and Taylor, 2009](#)).

However, the turnout rate of eligible Latino voters has historically lagged that of whites and blacks by substantial margins. In 2008, for example, 50% of eligible Latino voters cast ballots, compared with 65% of blacks and 66% of whites ([Lopez and Taylor, 2009](#)).

Also, despite Latino population growth, the number of Latinos who said they are registered to vote fell by about 600,000 between 2008 and 2010, according to Census Bureau data. This was the only significant decline in the number of Latino registered voters in the past two decades.³

Figure 1
Latino Participation in Presidential Elections, 1988-2012
(in millions)



Note: Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older.

Source: For 1988 through 2008, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey November Supplements; for 2012, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the August Current Population Survey

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² Eligible voters are U.S. citizens ages 18 and older.

³ Hispanic voter registration dropped from 4.6 million people in 1988 to 4.4 million people in 1990.

There is not yet any nationwide data on Latino voter registration levels so far in 2012. In the only four states that report such records by ethnicity—[Alabama](#), [Florida](#), [Georgia](#) and [North Carolina](#)—the 2012 registration levels of Hispanics have already surpassed the 2008 levels. However, these states are not necessarily representative of the nation as a whole; more so than most other states, they have experienced very rapid growth in their Hispanic population in recent years.

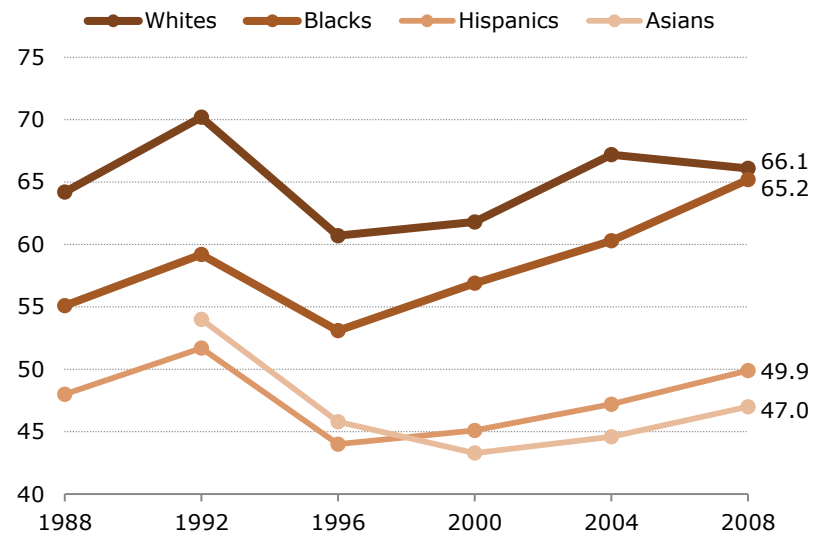
Latinos are the nation's largest minority group.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2011 there were 51.9 million Latinos in the U.S., making up 16.7% of the nation's population.

As the number of Latino eligible voters has grown, so too has the number of Latinos casting votes in presidential elections. In 2008, 9.7 million Latinos cast a vote—a record then, and up from 7.6 million in 2004, also a record year.⁴ In addition, Latinos represent a growing share of voters. In 2008, Hispanics made up 7.4% of all voters, up from 6.0% in 2004 ([Lopez and Taylor, 2009](#)).

Nonetheless, Hispanics are still a smaller part of the potential electorate than might be expected given their rapid population growth and share of the general population. For

Figure 2
Voter Turnout Rates in Presidential Elections, 1988-2008
(%)



Notes: Hispanics are of any race. Whites, blacks and Asians include only non-Hispanics. Data for non-Hispanic Asians were not available in 1988.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey November Supplements

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⁴ Similar electoral participation patterns are evident in midterm election cycles. In 2010, a record 6.6 million Latinos voted. For an analysis of Latino voter participation trends during midterm election years, see Lopez ([2011](#)).

example, according to the Pew Hispanic analysis, more than 25 million blacks are eligible to vote in 2012 as are more than 152 million whites—both larger than the Hispanic electorate.

Part of the reason for this difference is that Hispanics are younger and less likely to hold citizenship than other groups. Overall, more than half (55%) of all Hispanics are not eligible to vote because they are under age 18 or are an adult that does not hold U.S. citizenship. By comparison, about one-in-five (21%) whites, less than one-third (31%) of blacks and 46% of Asians are ineligible to vote.

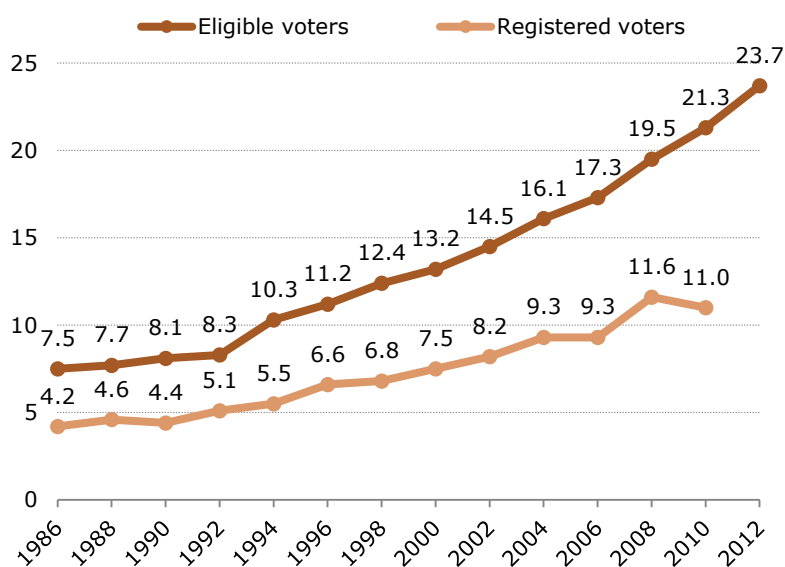
This report explores electoral participation trends among Hispanics in recent presidential election cycles. It also provides a snapshot of the geography and demography of the Hispanic vote in 2012, with a special focus on the so-called “battleground states.” Accompanying this report are [state profiles](#) of Latino eligible voters in 41 states and the District of Columbia, each based on data from the 2010 American Community Survey. Also accompanying this report is an [interactive map](#) showing key characteristics of Latino voters in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Trends in Latino Voter Registration

Just as the number of Hispanics eligible to vote in the nation's elections has grown, so too has the number of Hispanics who are registered to vote. Since 1986, the number of Hispanic registered voters has more than doubled, reaching a record 11.6 million in 2008.

However, in 2010, according to an analysis of data from the Voting and Registration supplement of the November CPS supplement, the number of Hispanic registered voters was 11.0 million, down from the record 11.6 million in 2008.⁵

Figure 3
Hispanic Eligible Voter and Registered Voter Trends, 1986-2012
(in millions)



Note: Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens.

Source: For 1988 through 2010, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey November Supplements; for 2012, Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the August Current Population Survey

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There are several possible reasons for this decline. First, 2008 was an historic election year with a record voter turnout. The Democratic primary contest between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton generated high level of interest among Latino voters, including the many who live in [California](#) and [Texas](#), states that, because of their position on the primary calendar, often don't have much of a say in the outcome of the race ([Minushkin and Lopez, 2008](#)). This

⁵ A portion of this decline in Hispanic voter registrations—about 100,000 registered voters—can be attributed to the CPS weights used. As noted in the methodology section of Passel and Cohn (2010), population estimates from the CPS rely on weights that are linked to the Census Bureau's official population estimates of the civilian non-institutional population of the nation. Each year, the Census Bureau produces a new estimate of the U.S. population, updating the enumeration of the previous census and reflecting changes in the number of births, deaths and net international migration. Normally, this updating has a minor impact on the resulting CPS estimates. However, in 2007 and 2008 the Census Bureau made major revisions in the methodology used to measure population change since the 2000 Census. These revisions had a notable impact on the resulting estimates of the Hispanic population, which in turn affected population figures based on the CPS, including estimates of the number of registered voters. Taking updated Census Bureau population estimates for 2008 into account, there were an estimated 11.5 million registered Hispanic voters in 2008, 100,000 fewer than originally reported by the Census Bureau based on the unrevised population data.

may have contributed to a spike in Latino voter registration to 11.6 million from 9.3 million in 2006. Overall, nearly half (48%) of all Hispanic eligible voters reside in [California](#) and [Texas](#).

Second, the economic downturn may have impacted voter registration of Latinos. Because the foreclosure and housing crisis hit Hispanics harder than other groups, many Hispanics may have had to move. That could mean that a disproportionate share of their voter registrations lapsed as a result of a change of address ([Gonzalez, 2012](#)).

While national data on voter registrations among Hispanics won't be available until after the November election, some states do publish voter registration statistics for Hispanics.

According to the [Florida Department of State Division of Elections](#), the number of Hispanics registered to vote [in that battleground state](#) stood at 1.6 million as of July 16, 2012, up from 1.4 million in 2008. In [Georgia](#), the [Secretary of State Elections Division](#) reports that 105,000 Hispanics are registered to vote this year, up from 82,000 in 2008. In the case of [North Carolina](#), another battleground state, the [State Board of Elections](#) reports that 102,000 Hispanics are registered to vote as of September 22, up from 68,000 in 2008. The [Secretary of State Elections Division](#) in [Alabama](#) reports that 15,000 Hispanics were registered to vote as of August, up from 12,000 in 2008.

Growth in the number of Hispanic registered voters in each state may reflect Hispanic population growth. Between 2000 and 2010, [Alabama](#), [Georgia](#) and [North Carolina](#) experienced some of the fastest Hispanic population growth. In each, the Hispanic population doubled or nearly doubled ([Passel, Cohn and Lopez, 2011](#)).

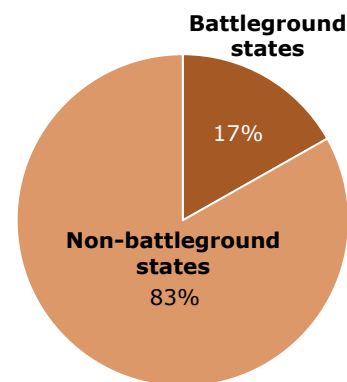
The Geography of the Latino Vote

Some 17% of all Hispanic eligible voters live in this year's battleground states—[Colorado](#), [Florida](#), [Iowa](#), [Nevada](#), New Hampshire, [North Carolina](#), [Ohio](#), [Virginia](#) and [Wisconsin](#).⁶ And among eligible voters in the battleground states, 8% are Hispanic. In some battleground states, there is a sizeable number of Hispanic eligible voters. For example, in [Florida](#) there are more than 2 million Hispanics who are eligible to vote, making up 15.9% of the state's eligible voters.

However, most potential Latino voters do not live in battleground states. More than half (55%) live in just three states—[California](#), [Texas](#) and [New York](#). When other non-battleground states with large Latino populations are included—[Arizona](#), [Illinois](#), [New Jersey](#) and [New Mexico](#)—two-thirds (68%) of the Latino electorate is accounted for.

Nonetheless the presence of Hispanics in this year's battleground states has grown since 2008. The battleground states of [Florida](#), [Colorado](#) and [Nevada](#) each have large Hispanic populations that have grown in size and share since 2008. In [Florida](#), for example, the number of Hispanics eligible to vote grew by 244,000 between 2008 and 2010. Their share also increased, rising to 15.9% from 14.5% in 2008.

Figure 4
Share of Latino Eligible Voters Who Are in Battleground States



Notes: Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens. The nine "battleground states" are Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS)

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⁶ Battleground states were identified by the Pew Research Center using ratings for each state in September from: The Cook Political Report, MSNBC, The New York Times, Real Clear Politics, Karl Rove, CNN, Pollster.com, and the Washington Post. The ratings by these different groups yield nine battleground states (rated as tossup or lean Republican or Democrat) and 42 safe states, including Washington, D.C.

In [Virginia](#) and [North Carolina](#), Hispanics are also a larger presence among eligible voters in 2012 compared with 2008, though their shares remain small—3.7% and 2.9% respectively. In some other battlegrounds, the number of Hispanic eligible voters is below 2%. For example, in [Ohio](#), while there are 166,000 Hispanic eligible voters, they make up just 1.9% of the all eligible voters there. In the case of New Hampshire, the size and share of the Hispanic electorate is even smaller—17,000 and 1.7%, respectively.

Table 1
Hispanic Eligible Voters in 2012
Swing States

	Number of Hispanic eligible voters <i>(in thousands)</i>	Share of all eligible voters who are Hispanic (%)
Florida	2,089	15.9
Colorado	484	13.7
Nevada	268	15.1
Virginia	214	3.7
North Carolina	196	2.9
Ohio	166	1.9
Wisconsin	130	3.1
Iowa	52	2.3
New Hampshire	17	1.7

Note: Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS)

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A Profile of Latino Eligible Voters

The Latino electorate is demographically different from other groups of eligible voters, and also it is different than the nation's Hispanic population overall.

According to Pew Hispanic tabulations of the 2012 August Current Population Survey, Latino eligible voters are younger than either white or black eligible voters. Overall, nearly one-third (32%) of all Hispanic eligible voters are ages 18 to 29, compared with 19% among whites and 25% among blacks. In addition, a smaller share (11%) of Latino eligible voters are ages 65 or older, compared with white (21%) or black (14%) eligible voters.

Hispanic eligible voters are also more likely to be naturalized U.S. citizens than either white eligible voters or black eligible voters. One-quarter of all Hispanic eligible voters are naturalized U.S. citizens, while just 3% of white eligible voters and 7% of black eligible voters are naturalized U.S. citizens.

Among Latino eligible voters, 58% are of Mexican origin, 14% are of Puerto Rican origin, 6% are of Cuban origin and 22% are of Central American, South American or other Hispanic origin, according to the Pew Hispanic analysis. This differs from the overall Hispanic origin distribution of the general U.S. Hispanic population in which some 64% are of Mexican origin, 9% are Puerto Rican and 5% are Cuban origin.

Table 2
Demographics of Eligible Voters, by Race and Ethnicity, 2012
(%)

	Hispanic eligible voters	White eligible voters	Black eligible voters
Age			
18-29	32	19	25
30-44	29	23	26
45-54	17	19	19
55-64	11	18	15
65 and older	11	21	14
Type of citizen			
Citizen by birth	75	97	93
Naturalized citizen	25	3	7
Hispanic origin			
Mexican	58	---	---
Puerto Rican	14	---	---
Cuban	6	---	---
Other	22	---	---

Notes: Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens. Hispanics are of any race. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the August 2012 Current Population Survey

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A Record 24 Million Latinos Are Eligible to Vote, but Turnout Rate Has Lagged That of Whites, Blacks

Appendix

Appendix Table A1

Hispanic Eligible Voter Population, by State, 2010

	Number of Hispanic eligible voters (in thousands)	Share of all eligible voters who are Hispanic (%)	Share of Hispanics who are eligible voters (%)
Alabama	45	1.3	24.7
Alaska	21	4.1	51.3
Arizona	824	19.2	43.2
Arkansas	51	2.4	27.9
California	5,899	25.6	41.9
Colorado	484	13.7	46.1
Connecticut	239	9.4	49.7
Delaware	29	4.4	39.5
District of Columbia	22	4.9	40.6
Florida	2,089	15.9	49.1
Georgia	220	3.3	25.7
Hawaii	71	7.3	58.4
Idaho	69	6.3	38.7
Illinois	773	8.8	37.9
Indiana	141	3.0	36.3
Iowa	52	2.3	34.5
Kansas	112	5.5	37.1
Kentucky	41	1.3	31.3
Louisiana	86	2.6	44.2
Maine	10	1.0	***
Maryland	150	3.7	31.6
Massachusetts	299	6.4	47.4
Michigan	196	2.7	45.0
Minnesota	81	2.1	32.7
Mississippi	27	1.2	36.3
Missouri	87	2.0	41.2
Montana	17	2.2	60.1
Nebraska	63	4.8	37.6
Nevada	268	15.1	37.2
New Hampshire	17	1.7	47.6
New Jersey	677	11.5	43.3
New Mexico	550	38.6	57.3
New York	1,651	12.5	48.1
North Carolina	196	2.9	24.4
North Dakota	7	1.4	***
Ohio	166	1.9	46.8
Oklahoma	111	4.1	33.5
Oregon	146	5.3	32.4
Pennsylvania	353	3.7	49.2
Rhode Island	54	7.1	41.3
South Carolina	66	1.9	28.4
South Dakota	9	1.5	***
Tennessee	76	1.6	26.6
Texas	4,180	26.4	43.9
Utah	123	7.0	34.1
Vermont	6	1.2	***
Virginia	214	3.7	33.9
Washington	271	5.7	35.6
West Virginia	12	0.8	54.7
Wisconsin	130	3.1	38.9
Wyoming	25	6.1	50.8

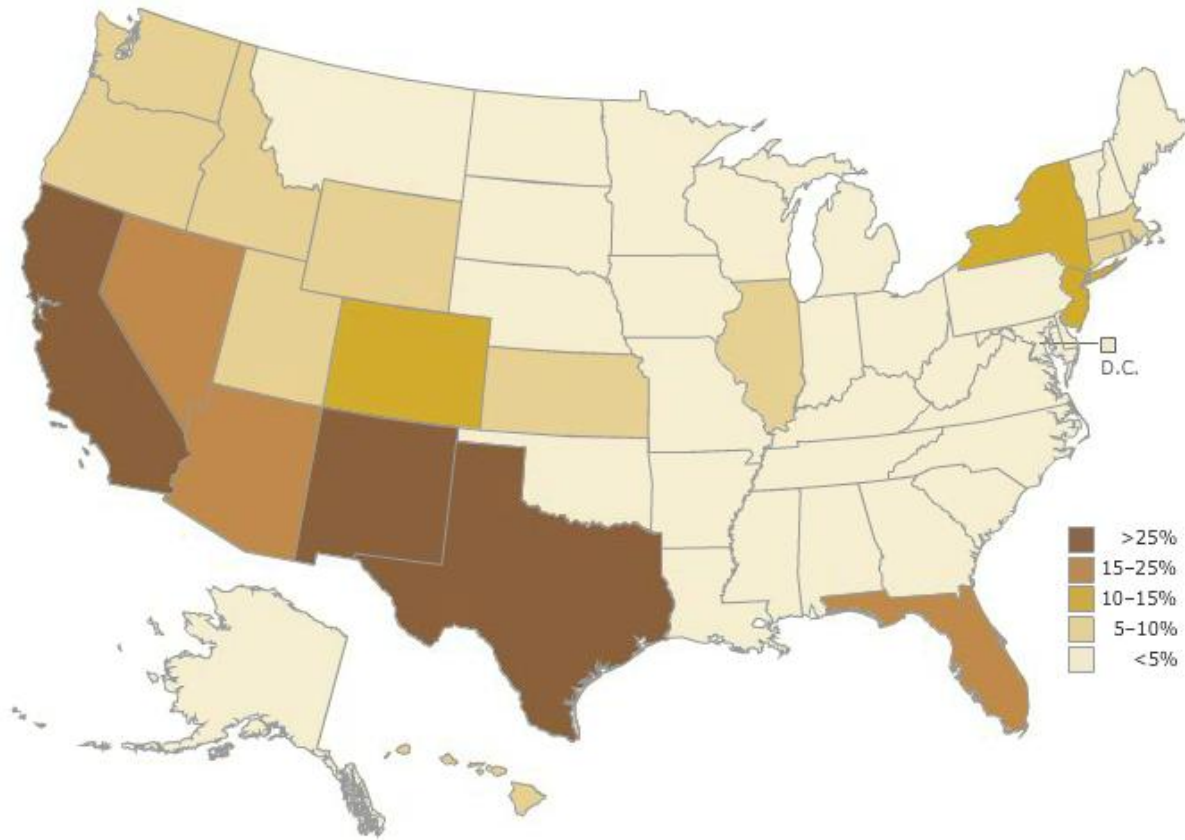
Notes: The nine "battleground states" are bolded. *** denotes that the Hispanic samples in the 2010 American Community Survey are not large enough to generate reliable estimates. Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 ACS (1% IPUMS)

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Appendix Chart A1

Latinos as a Percent of Eligible Voters, by State, 2010



Note: Eligible voters are persons ages 18 and older who are U.S. citizens.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the 2010 ACS (1% IPUMS)

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