

The Voting Power of New Americans

Main Topic: Voting Behavior and Immigration Status.

Key Words: New Americans, Immigration and Naturalization Act, DREAM Act, Voting Behavior, Immigration Status.

Description: The main focus of this brief is to discover how being an immigrant in the United States affects their voting behavior. Through learning more about the process immigrants have to go through to become a U.S. citizen, a better understanding of what drives their voting behavior will be discovered.

Key Points:

- Understanding the main factors of the Immigration and Naturalization Act and how that affects the naturalization process of becoming a U.S. citizen.
- The main articles of the DREAM Act and how it could have been a large supporting factor for immigrants.
- The strict enforcement of immigration laws in Alabama.
- The stances of the Republican and Democratic parties expressed through the DREAM Act and the enforcement of immigration laws in Alabama.
- How the Presidential candidates need to take into consideration the large increase in New American voting as they are running their campaigns.

Issue Brief:

One of the most popular topics in the GOP race is the issue of immigrants and immigration laws. What is unique about this year's candidates is the fact that Donald Trump has openly expressed his personal viewpoints on this issue and they are far from being the politically correct stance that most politicians take. This brief's main focus is on the voting behavior of immigrants in the U.S. who have achieved citizenship. Through learning more about the process of immigrants becoming U.S. citizens, a better understanding of what will drive their voting behavior for this upcoming Presidential election will be created.

¹ "How the United States Immigration System Works."

With the government having to figure out what to do with the large number of Syrian refugees looking to come into the U.S., it is very interesting to explore more about the refugee and immigrant laws that are in place. The number of refugees that are admitted is completely dependent on how many the President and Congress believe should be let in.¹ Once refugees make it into the U.S. they are allowed to apply for asylum for as long as they believe they may be persecuted upon returning to their homeland. For regular immigrants, the process of making it in and staying in the U.S. is more complicated.

The Immigration and Naturalization Act allows 675,000 permanent immigrants per year, but they still have to go through the naturalization process to qualify as a U.S. citizen.¹ Once an immigrant has acquired a green card, which is no easy task, they have to wait for up to five years before they can qualify as a U.S. citizen.¹ If immigrants do not go through this process and stay as illegal immigrants, states are passing bills that make it extremely difficult for them to stay. Alabama, for example, passed a bill in 2011 that caused tens of thousands of people to leave because they were afraid of being deported or thrown in jail.² Five other states, all with Republican majorities in their House of Representatives, followed suit. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there is the DREAM Act that was supported by the Democrats in Congress in 2010 but failed to get to the Senate because of Republican opposition.² This act assumed that children immigrants who have now grown up in the United States are innocent of any immigration violations and are therefore eligible for permanent residency.² The strict laws set in place in Alabama as well as the DREAM Act being turned down clearly depicts where Republicans and Democrats have fallen in the past on immigration issues.

With the upcoming Presidential election, these different stances on immigration taken up by the Republican and Democratic parties will affect their voter support. The number of New Americans, a term for immigrants who are naturalized U.S. citizens, and Latinos in the U.S. has increased dramatically. During the last Presidential election in 2012, there were 18.1 million New American voters, which was 11.8% of all registered voters, while there were also 13.7 million Latino voters, which was 8.9% of all registered voters.³ As New Americans become more integrated into the culture of the United States, they will become more and more involved in the Presidential voting process.

In conclusion, as the number of New Americans rapidly grows the voice of incoming immigrants will be heard through these New Americans who have already endured the arduous process of becoming a U.S. citizen. This will result in a much larger amount of support for Democrats because of their past stance on immigration and their ongoing attempts to make the process of obtaining citizenship easier. If the Republicans do not make a greater attempt to support the constant influx of immigrants, which in this case Donald Trump is not exactly helping, they will have a hard time gaining support in states with large populations of New Americans.

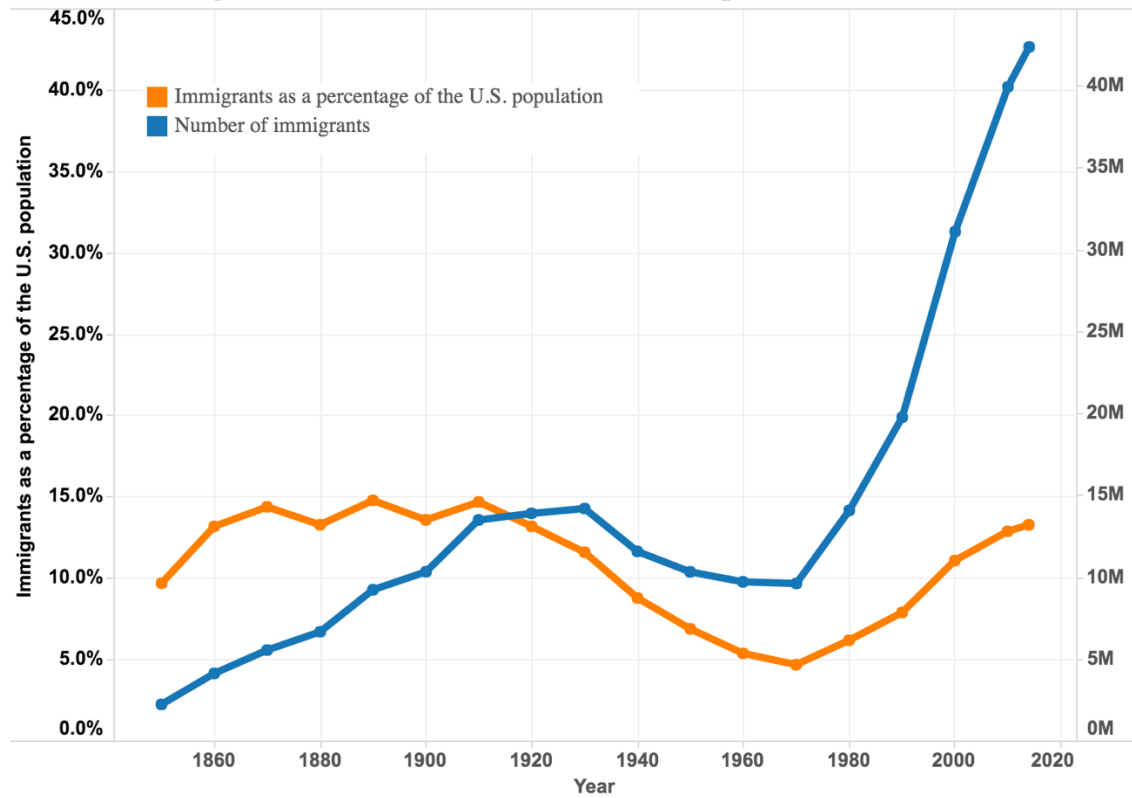
¹ "How the United States Immigration System Works."

² "Issues in Race and Ethnicity"

³ "New Americans in the Voting Booth"

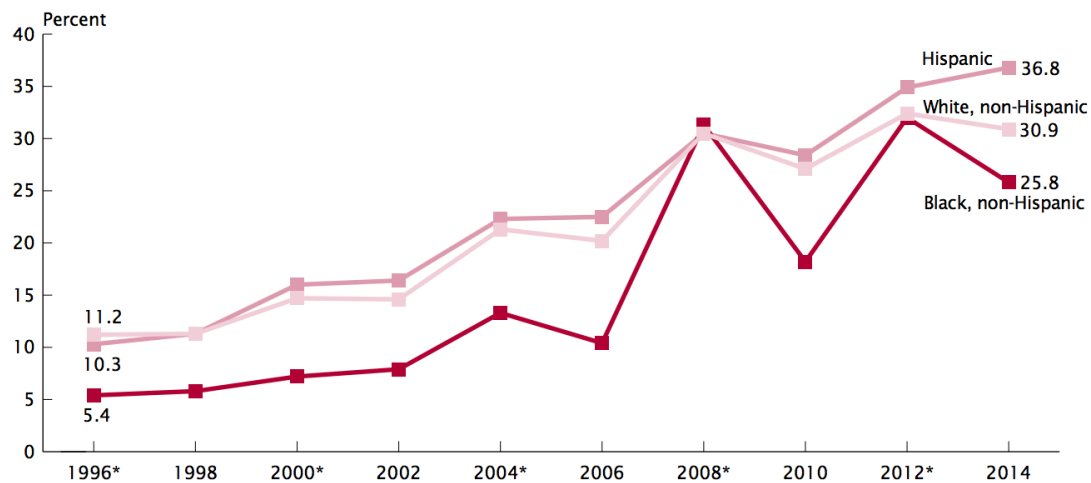
Main Images:

Number of Immigrants and Their Share of the Total U.S. Population, 1850-2014



Migration Policy Institute (MPI) Data Hub
<http://migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub>

Figure 10. Alternative Method of Voting Reported by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996 to 2014



*Presidential election year.
 Note: Alternative method includes those who voted early and/or by absentee ballot.
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 1996-2014.

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¹ "How the United States Immigration System Works."

² "Issues in Race and Ethnicity"

³ "New Americans in the Voting Booth"