

## **Issue Brief: Latino Americans and Immigration**

### **Key Words**

Latino Americans, immigration, legality, immigration policy, SB 1070

### **Description**

This issue brief outlines Latino immigration demographics in the United States, and how the growing Latino population has led to immigration becoming a salient issue in American politics.

### **Key Points**

- The Latino population is the fastest growing racial demographic within the United States, largely due to immigration. Latinos make up the majority of the foreign-born population in the United States.
- Immigration has become a salient issue within the Latino community, especially because a number of Latino immigrants are undocumented.
- Immigration policy has come to play a significant part in Latino voting alignment in American politics.
- Arizona SB 1070 is an example of hostile immigration policy within the United States. Many Latinos continue to face racist backlash and anti-immigration sentiment.

### **Issue Brief**

The Latino demographic refers to people of South and Central, and Caribbean American origin, who generally come from Spanish-speaking countries. The Latino population is the fastest-growing demographic in the United States. Between 2000 and 2006, the Latino population grew 24.4%; more than three times the growth of the overall U.S. population (6.1%).<sup>1</sup> Currently, Latinos are 15.5% of the overall population. It is projected that by 2050, the Latino population will make up 24.4% of the American population.<sup>2</sup> The Latino population is largely

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<sup>1</sup> "Hispanics in the United States." U.S. Census Bureau Report. 2006

<sup>2</sup> "Hispanics in the United States." U.S. Census Bureau Report. 2006

concentrated in the Southwestern United States, though there are significant populations in Miami and New York City.

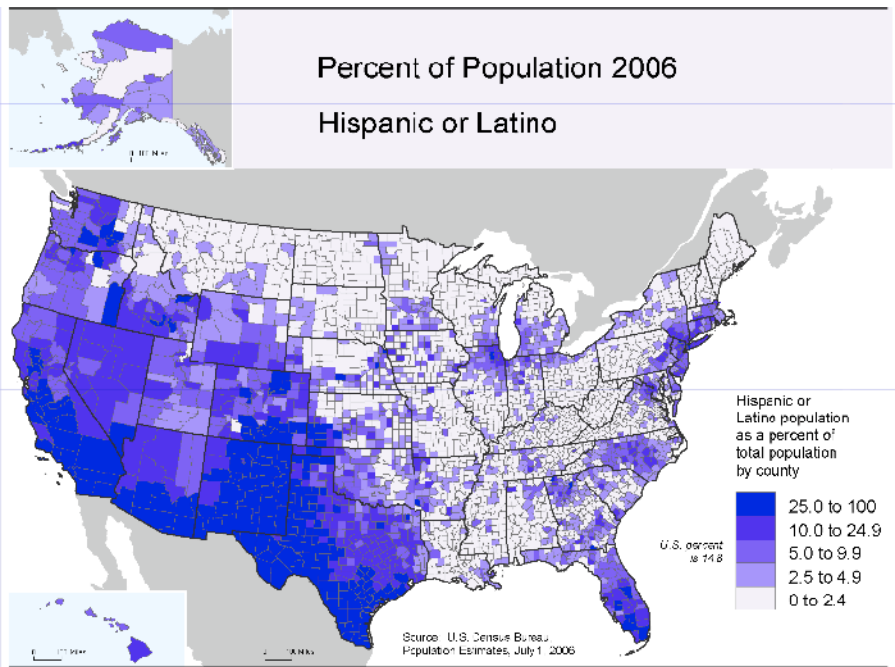


Image 1: Concentration of the Latino Population in the United States, 2006<sup>3</sup>

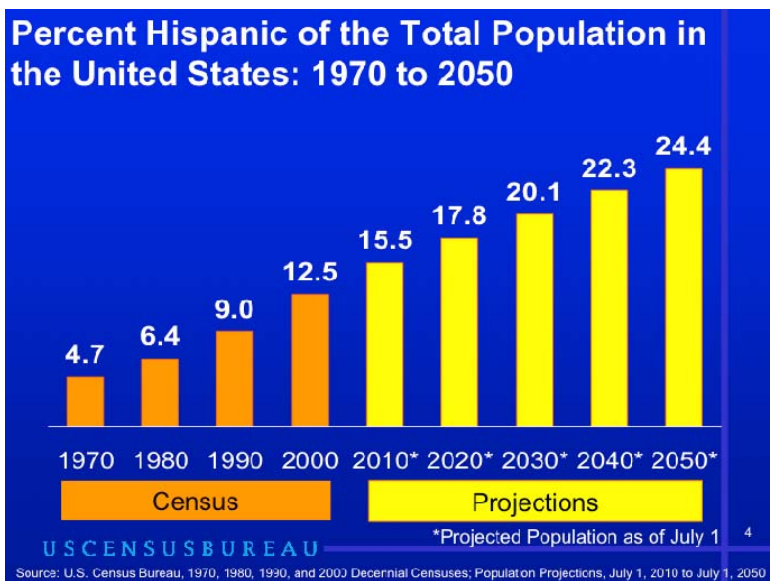


Image 2: Projected Population Growth of Latinos<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Hispanics in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau Report. 2006

<sup>4</sup> “Hispanics in the United States.” U.S. Census Bureau Report. July 2006

The significant growth rate of the Latino population is due to the large number of Latino immigrants. Latinos make up the largest number of new immigrants in the United States; in 2008, Latinos made up 53% of the over-all foreign-born population.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that over 40% of the Latino population is foreign-born.<sup>6</sup> A majority of the Latino foreign-born population is Mexican, owing to its geographic proximity to the United States.

Because of the large immigrant population, a significant number of Latinos are in the United States illegally. In 2005, it was estimated that over 9.2 million undocumented Latino immigrants were living in the United States, the majority of which are located in the Southwest.<sup>7</sup> These illegal immigrants live and work undocumented in the United States. Many argue that illegal immigrants pose a threat to the American economy, as illegal aliens “take jobs” from American citizens without paying taxes. The issue of illegal immigration policy has become salient within American politics, specifically targeting the Latino community. Over a third of Latinos cite “immigration status” as the number one reason for discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

With their growing population, Latinos are also becoming a critical voting bloc. Historically, Latino party allegiance was determined by immigration policy and protection of immigrants’ civil rights.<sup>9</sup> In the 2008 election, 67% of the Latino vote went Democratic.<sup>10</sup> The Latino support for President Obama was largely in opposition to Senator McCain’s stricter immigration policies. However, more recent polls have shown that the Latino community is divided over immigration policy. This past October, 53% of Latinos polled argued that illegal

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<sup>5</sup> Kahn, Carrie. “Study Details Lives of Illegal Immigrants in the U.S.” **NPR**. June 15, 2005

<sup>6</sup> “Hispanics in the United States.” **U.S. Census Bureau Report**. July 2006

<sup>7</sup> “Strength in Diversity: The Economic and Political Clout of Immigrants, Latinos, and Asians.” **Immigration Policy Center**. July 2, 2010

<sup>8</sup> “Polls Show Latinos Divided Over Immigration Backlash.” **Life on MSNBC**. October 28, 2010

<sup>9</sup> DeSipio, Louis. *Counting on the Latino Vote*, pg, 80-81

<sup>10</sup> “Exit Polls.” 2008 Election Results. **New York Times**. November 4, 2008

immigrants should be fined, but not deported. 28% of those polled believe illegal immigrants should not be punished, while 13% believe illegal immigrants should be deported.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the growing Latino population, racist backlash against Latino aliens has emerged. This has led some Americans to push for harsher immigration laws. Between January and June 2010 alone, 46 states passed 314 pieces of legislation related to immigration.<sup>12</sup> Arizona has even gone so far as to enact the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 in June 2010, in which police officers have the right to ask people for their immigration papers without reason (blatantly targeting Latinos). Supporters of SB 1070 claim that the act deters the unlawful entry of illegal aliens and drug traffickers across the Mexican border. SB 1070 triggered widespread protest, both nationally and internationally. The most controversial aspects of SB 1070 were eventually repealed, based on the arguments: the state cannot punish people for failing to produce their immigration papers, nor conduct warrant-less arrests on people whom they believe to be in the country illegally.<sup>13</sup> However, the act remains in effect today, further rifting Latino immigrants from the Arizona population. The support of SB 1070, and its opposition movements, display the critical role Latino immigration has come to play in American politics.



Image 3: “Do I look illegal?” sticker, from the nation-wide campaign to repeal SB 1070<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Illegal Immigration Backlash Worries, Divides Latinos.” **Pew Hispanic Center**. October 28 2010.

<sup>12</sup> “Immigration Policies in the United States.” **CNN U.S.** July 28 2010

<sup>13</sup> “Arizona Governor Files Appeal to Immigration Law Injunction.” **CNN U.S.** July 29 2010

<sup>14</sup> “Do You Look Illegal?” Button. **Irregular Times**.

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