

Emerging Electorate: \_\_\_\_\_

# LATINX VOTERS

---

in North Carolina

By  
Sunny Frothingham

Edited by  
Isela Gutiérrez and  
Tomas Lopez

Design by  
Gabe Casalett

September 2019

## Introduction

*Latinx voters are poised to play an important role in North Carolina's 2019 and 2020 elections.*

The 2018 midterm election brought a surge in Latinx voter turnout, and the Latinx voter population as a whole continues to grow. Projections from the State Demographer's Office indicate that Latinxs make up 11 percent of the state population in 2019, but almost one in six (17%) of North Carolinians under 18 are Latinx. Further, while two out of three Latinxs in North Carolina are citizens overall, more than 9 out of 10

Latinx North Carolinians under 18 are citizens.<sup>1</sup> As a result, we can expect Latinx communities to play a greater role in the elections to come, especially as young Latinx North Carolinians reach voting age.

This report is a follow up to Democracy North Carolina's 2012 *A Snapshot of Latino Voters in North Carolina*,<sup>2</sup> and will examine the latest available data about Latinx communities and voters in North Carolina. It will highlight Latinx communities in both rural and urban parts of the state, and present Latinx-specific concerns and needs related to elections and voting.

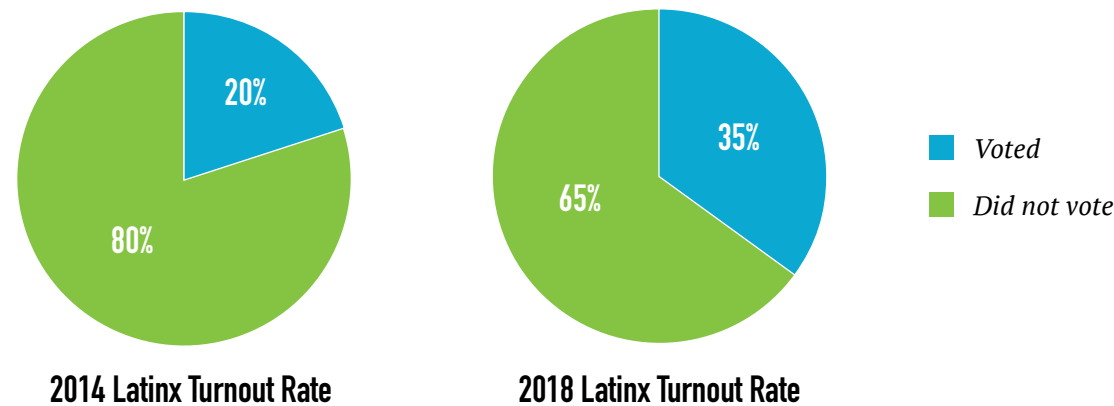


## 2018 Turnout Trends

Ahead of the 2018 election, Pew Research reported that half of Latinxs felt their situation in the U.S. was worse compared to a year before, and two-thirds believed that the Trump administration’s policies have been harmful to Latinxs.<sup>3</sup> These concerns appear to have sparked renewed interest in the midterm elections, with major increases in participation by Latinx voters in North Carolina and nationwide. According to Pew, 27 percent of Latinxs who voted in the U.S. in 2018 reported that they were voting in a midterm election for the very first time.<sup>4</sup> And, a UCLA analysis of the 2018 election found that national Latinx voter turnout almost doubled from 2014 to 2018.<sup>5</sup>

This enthusiasm for the 2018 midterm election held true in North Carolina as well, and 2018 Latinx

voter turnout surged. Unfortunately, the State Board of Elections data is incomplete since voter registration forms did not include a “Hispanic/Latino” classification until 2002 and many voters skip that question on the form.<sup>6</sup> However, based on the data available, two and a half times the number of self-identified Latinx voters cast ballots in North Carolina in 2018 than in 2014. This was also reflected in the Latinx turnout rate (the percentage of registered voters who cast ballots in a given election). **Latinx turnout increased by 15 percentage points, or 75 percent, compared to the last midterm.** In 2018, 35 percent of Latinx registered voters cast ballots in 2018 compared to just 20 percent in 2014.<sup>7</sup>



Increases in Latinx turnout held true at the county level as well, where Latinxs made up a greater share of voters in almost every county in 2018 compared to 2014.

- **In 15 counties in North Carolina, the Latinx turnout rate was 40 percent or more.**<sup>8</sup> Most of the counties with high turnout rates were places with fairly small populations of registered Latinx voters, like Buncombe, Chatham, and some Western Carolina counties — meaning that, while the raw numbers of ballots cast were smaller, a greater proportion of the registered Latinx voters cast ballots.
- **However, some urban counties with larger Latinx communities also had high turnout rates.** In Wake County, almost 11,000 of the 25,000 registered Latinxs voted in 2018, amassing a turnout rate of 43 percent. In Durham County, 3,600 of the 8,600 Latinxs registered to vote cast ballots in 2018 resulting in a turnout rate of 42 percent.

- **The county with the most Latinx voters was Mecklenburg**, where over 12,000 Latinxs cast ballots in 2018, for a turnout rate of 38 percent.

Latinx turnout increased significantly statewide in 2018, as reflected below in the 15 counties where Latinx voters made up the largest share of voters.

County	Vote Share, Latinx Voters	Latinx Voters, 2018	Latinx Turnout, 2018	Latinx Turnout, 2014	
1	Lee	5%	919	38%	20%
2	Hoke	4%	506	26%	16%
3	Cumberland	3%	3,107	26%	17%
4	Mecklenburg	3%	12,179	38%	20%
5	Union	3%	2,427	42%	23%
6	Durham	3%	3,556	42%	24%
7	Onslow	3%	1,054	19%	12%
8	Harnett	3%	899	27%	16%
9	Cabarrus	2%	1,845	39%	22%
10	Wake	2%	10,876	43%	27%
11	Alamance	2%	1,409	41%	23%
12	Orange	2%	1,620	43%	28%
13	Johnston	2%	1,531	32%	17%
14	Duplin	2%	351	23%	12%
15	Forsyth	2%	2,984	32%	18%

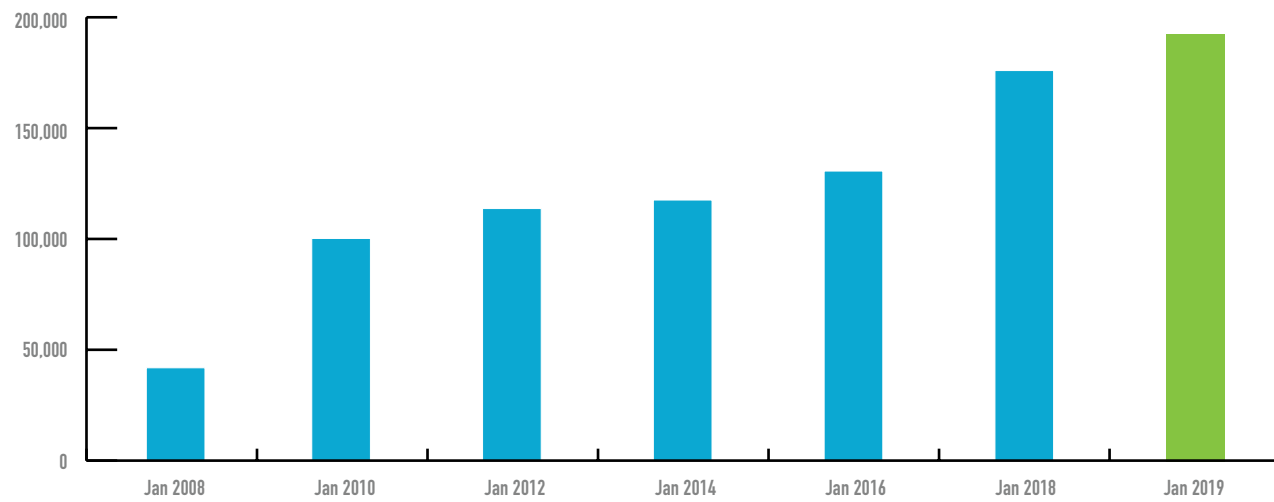
## Voter Registration

As of Summer 2019, there are almost 200,000 self-identified Latinxs registered to vote in North Carolina, accounting for 2.9 percent of North Carolina’s 6.6 million registered voters — an amount four and a half times the number of self-identified Latinx voters in the state at the beginning of 2008.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these gains, the true number of

registered North Carolina voters who are Latinx is unknown since the data is incomplete. For context, Catalist, a firm that analyzes data for progressive organizations,<sup>10</sup> suggests that the number of Latinx voters on the rolls in North Carolina is much higher — closer to 330,000. This estimate is based on a variety of factors, including Spanish surnames.<sup>11</sup>

Self-Identified Latinx Voters in North Carolina

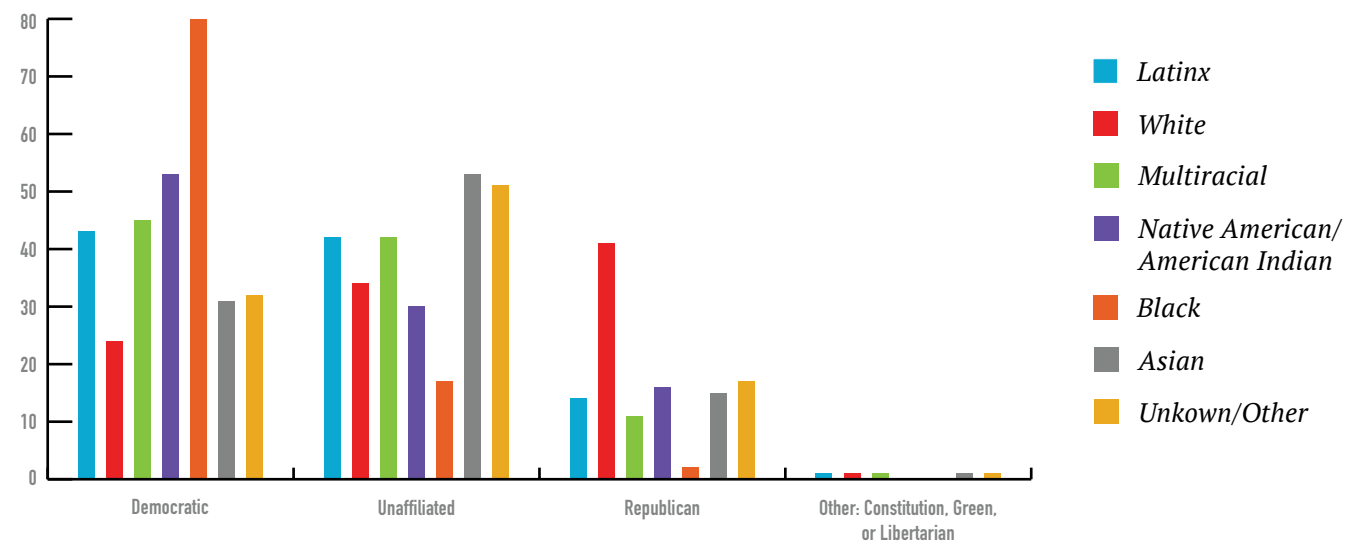


**Latinx Voters by Party**

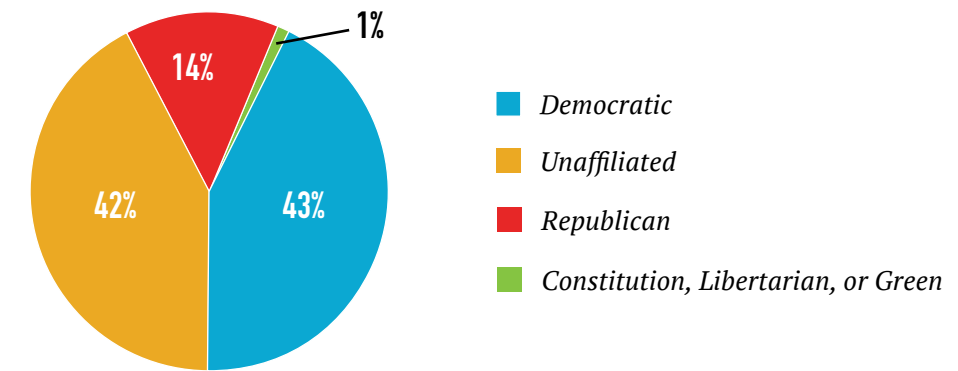
The vast majority of Latinx voters in North Carolina are registered as either Democrats (43 percent) or unaffiliated voters (42 percent), while only 14 percent are Republicans and 1 percent are Libertarian. Less than 1 percent of Latinxs are registered with the Green Party or the Constitution Party.<sup>13</sup> This distribution is roughly in line with a report by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) ahead of the 2016 election in which they found the bulk of Latinx voters on the rolls in the several states examined were split between Democrats and Unaffiliated or Third Party, with a smaller portion registered Republican.<sup>14</sup>

As seen in the illustration below, the partisan affiliation patterns for Latinx voters in North Carolina are fairly similar to those of Multiracial voters.

Partisan Affiliation of NC Voters by Race



Party Affiliation of Self-Identified Latinx Voters



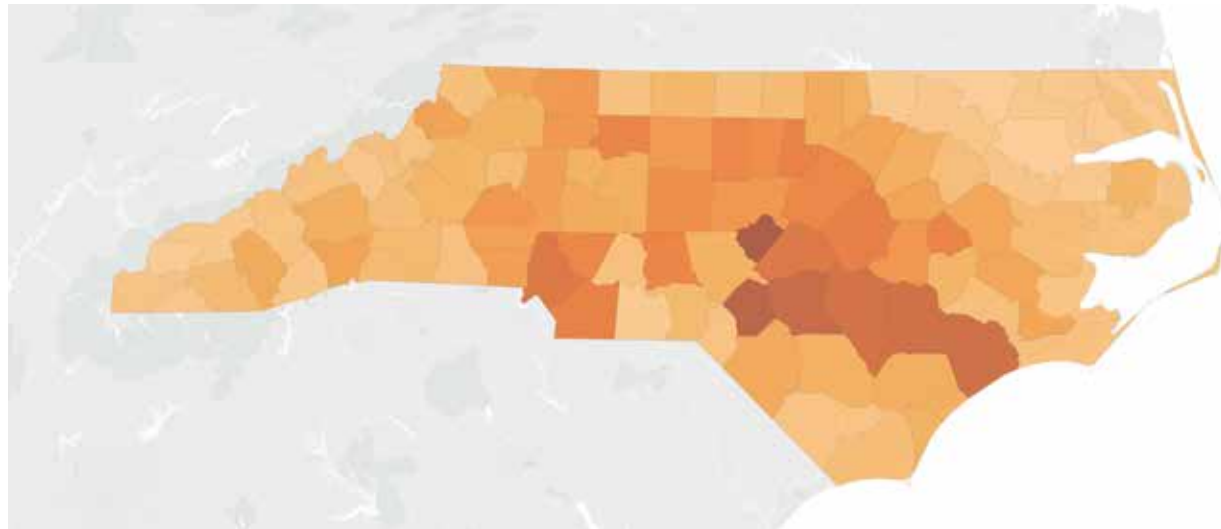
**Latinx Voters by County**

As illustrated in the following chart and map, the greatest *number* of Latinx voters are concentrated in urban counties, while Latinxs make up a greater *share* of registered voters in several southeastern counties. Cumberland, Johnston, Mecklenburg, Onslow, and Union are in the top ten for both number and percentage of registered voters.<sup>12</sup>

Top 10 Counties for Latinx Voters by Number and Share of Registered Voters

County	Number of Latinxs Registered to Vote	County	Share of Registered Voters who are Latinx
Statewide	192,569	Statewide	2.9%
1 Mecklenburg	32,185	1 Lee	6.9%
2 Wake	25,302	2 Hoke	6.2%
3 Cumberland	11,301	3 Cumberland	5.6%
4 Guilford	9,484	4 Onslow	5.2%
5 Forsyth	9,156	5 Duplin	5.1%
6 Durham	8,367	6 Sampson	5.0%
7 Union	5,825	7 Harnett	4.5%
8 Onslow	5,186	8 Mecklenburg	4.5%
9 Johnston	4,930	9 Johnston	4.0%
10 Cabarrus	4,734	10 Union	3.9%

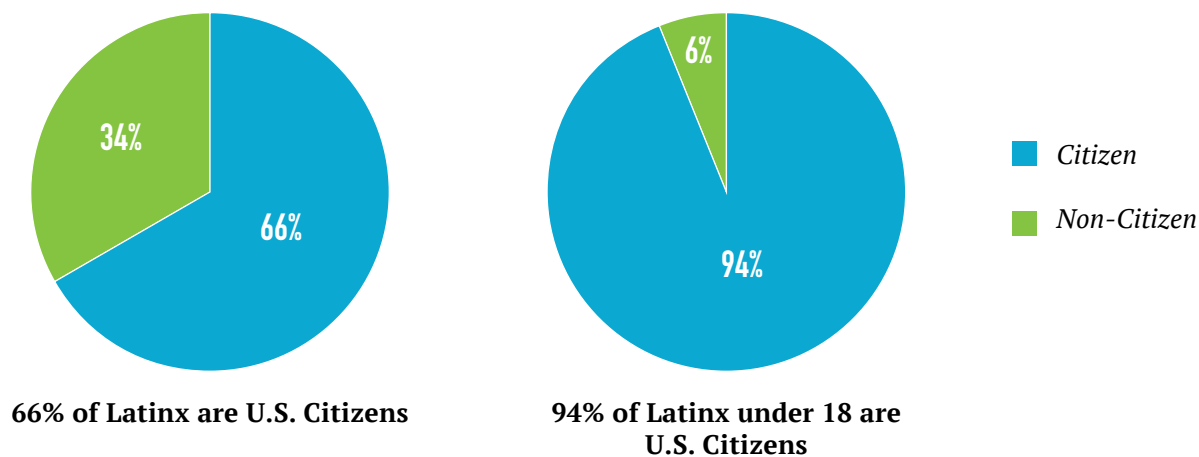
Percent of Self-Identified Latinx Voters, By County



In this map, the counties where Latinxs make up a greater share of registered voters are darker orange, while the counties where Latinxs make up a smaller share of registered voters are light orange.

Population

According to projections from the State Demographer, about 1.1 million Latinxs lived in North Carolina in 2018, making up about 11 percent of the state’s population. By 2020, 12 counties are expected to be 20 percent or more Latinx.<sup>15</sup> The majority of Latinxs in North Carolina are citizens (66 percent), either by birth or naturalization, and almost all Latinxs under 18 are citizens (94 percent), according to Census data.

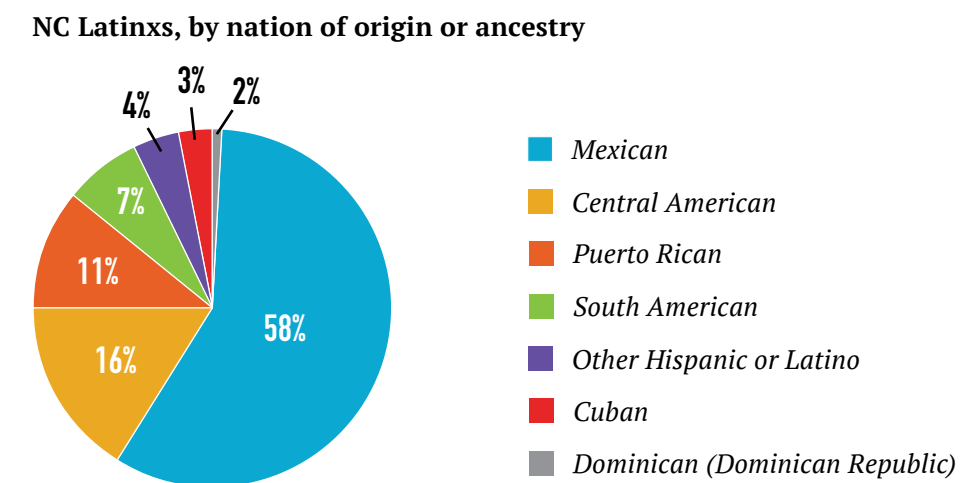


*More than 9 out of 10 Latinx North Carolinians under 18 are citizens. As a result, we can expect Latinx communities to play a greater role in the elections to come, especially as young Latinx North Carolinians reach voting age.*

While most Latinxs in North Carolina are American citizens, North Carolina Latinxs are a diverse group, with many different nations of origin and/or ancestry. According to 2017 Census data from the American Community Survey:

- Fifty-eight percent of Latinxs in North Carolina list Mexico as their country of origin or ancestry, while 16 percent come from other Central American countries, including 6 percent from El Salvador, 5 percent from Honduras, 3 percent from Guatemala, and 1 percent each from Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama.
- Sixteen percent of Latinxs in North Carolina list Caribbean nations as their countries of origin or ancestry, with 11 percent from Puerto Rico, 3 percent from Cuba, and 2 percent from the Dominican Republic.
- Seven percent list nations in South America, including 3 percent from Colombia, and 1 percent each from Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela.

It is important to note, again, the limitations of the data available — the Census currently only allows respondents to list one national origin but many Latinxs have more than one Latinx nation of origin.<sup>16</sup>



## Considerations for 2020

If trends continue, we can even expect higher numbers of registered Latinx voters, and significant turnout from Latinxs in North Carolina in 2019 and 2020. Latinx teens currently make up 8.4 percent of those who have pre-registered (16-and-17 year olds, who will be eligible in 2020). In addition to the Latinx voters coming of age, North Carolina can anticipate more Latinx voters to emerge from in-country moves to North Carolina and from the naturalization process. But this trend toward greater engagement is not guaranteed — elimination of voting barriers, full Census participation, and well-resourced Latinx voter engagement efforts are necessary to realize the full political power of North Carolina's Latinx voters.

### Barriers to Latinx Voting

Ensuring that Latinx communities are able to access the ballot without barriers or intimidation is an ongoing challenge, and, if current laws remain unchanged, additional hurdles are set to go into effect before the 2020 election. These include:

- **Early Voting Changes that Limit Voting Access:** The last Saturday has historically been the only weekend voting option in many counties, and an irreplaceable option for voters who are unable to vote during the work week. But as the result of a 2018 law, the final, high traffic, last Saturday of Early Voting will be eliminated in 2020. This same law imposed onerous, top-down hours requirements, which led 43 counties to reduce the number of Early Voting sites offered in 2018 because of increased costs. Early Voting is crucial for Latinx voters, 59 percent of whom cast ballots at Early Voting sites in 2016.<sup>17</sup> Proposals like House Bill 893 would repeal the worst parts of this law and restore Early Voting flexibility, including the last Saturday of Early Voting. The legislature should take immediate action to consider and approve this fix ahead of 2020.<sup>18</sup>
- **New Strict Photo ID Requirement:** The state's latest voter ID law is set to be implemented in 2020. The strict photo ID requirement is expected to disproportionately impact Latinx voters, who now make up 3 percent of registered voters overall, but are an estimated 4 percent of voters without DMV-issued ID.<sup>19</sup> Democracy North Carolina opposes any form of voter ID law — but if the current law is not overturned by the courts, the state legislature, State Board of Elections, and county Boards of Elections must do everything in their power to ensure that eligible voters are not disenfranchised by the law.
- **Inadequate Language Access for Spanish-Dominant Latinxs:** Currently, North Carolina is not required to provide information about voting in Spanish (or any other languages). As a result, the available Spanish-language voting materials are inconsistent from county to county and not created or updated as part of an intentional strategy for ensuring that monolingual Spanish speakers have full access to the voting process. Rather than continue with this piecemeal access, the State Board of Elections should adopt a statewide policy which establishes procedures for accurate, timely translations of written and online material, encourages publicity about elections and voting rules in Spanish-language media outlets, and improves poll worker cultural competence in serving voters whose preferred language is not English.

## 2020 Census and Latinx Voters

In addition to the presidential election, the next U.S. Census will also occur in 2020. The Census determines a wide range of outcomes in North Carolina and across the nation, from the apportionment of congressional districts to how federal dollars for education, health care, and highways are distributed to local communities. Because North Carolina has grown significantly since the last Census in 2010, we can expect to have more representatives in Congress after this Census. The challenge is ensuring that all of our communities are counted accurately, especially groups that have been undercounted in previous years, like Latinxs and children under 5. In June 2019, the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the Trump Administration's addition of a citizenship

question to the 2020 Census, holding that the Department of Commerce's rationale for adding it was insufficient.<sup>20</sup> The question was predicted to discourage Census participation, especially in Latinx communities, and in turn make the Census far less accurate. As of now the question will not be included, but advocates fear that its intimidating impact may remain. The attempt itself has made many people fearful that Census data may be used against them or their communities, despite federal laws which prohibit the Census Bureau from sharing information. For all questions and concerns about the 2020 Census, call 877-EL-CENSO (877-352-3676) for support in English and Spanish.

### Engaging Latinx Voters

Early, deep investment across the full civic engagement spectrum — from registration and education to get-out-the-vote and voter protection efforts — is necessary to support meaningful Latinx turnout in 2020. A number of Latinx-led North Carolina organizations have been doing this critical civic engagement work in

Latinx communities for multiple election cycles. (See p. 10 for examples of two such organizations and their 2018 voter engagement work.) Their continued, well-resourced efforts will be critical to encouraging high Latinx turnout in the elections to come.

“For all questions and concerns about the 2020 Census, call 877-EL-CENSO (877-352-3676) for support in English and Spanish.”

## El Pueblo

**El Pueblo is a nonprofit organization based in Raleigh, NC, specializing in leadership development for both youth and adults among Wake County's growing Latinx community.**

In 2018, El Pueblo partnered with Common Cause NC, Democracy NC, the NALEO Educational Fund, and the tilde Language Justice Cooperative to create a Spanish language voter guide that was hosted online at [votemosNC.com](http://votemosNC.com) and mailed directly to approximately 100,000 Latinx voters throughout the state. Although we did not conduct a formal experiment, 46 percent of the registered Hispanic voters who received the guides voted, as compared to 35 percent for all registered Hispanic voters in the state, an 11 percentage point difference. Our canvassers had one-on-one conversations with 4,804 registered voters across the state to encourage them to vote and get involved in El Pueblo's advocacy efforts. Of these registered voters, 2,648 voted in 2018 with a turnout rate of 55 percent among voters canvassed by El Pueblo. In addition to mail and phone outreach to voters all over the state, El Pueblo conducted local outreach and education here

in Wake County. In collaboration with NC Asian Americans Together (NCAAT) and the NALEO Educational Fund, we conducted a door canvass to educate voters in Raleigh about early voting and the amendments that would be on their ballot. We also co-hosted nonpartisan candidate forums with allies from the Raleigh Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., the League of Women Voters of Wake County, NCAAT, Raleigh Police Accountability Community Taskforce (PACT), WakeUP Wake County, and members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. On Election Day, we conducted two voter protection initiatives: poll monitoring at the polling place with the greatest concentration of Latinx registered voters in Raleigh in support of Democracy NC's voter protection program, and a remote call center hosted at El Pueblo through NALEO's 888-VE-Y-VOTA hotline, where we received calls from voters in North Carolina and surrounding states.

## North Carolina Congress of Latino Organizations

**The North Carolina Congress of Latino Organizations ("the Latino Congress") is a nonpartisan broad-based network of grassroots organizations dedicated to building collective power and ensuring the fair treatment and equal opportunities of Latino immigrants in North Carolina.**

Prior to the 2018 election, the Latino Congress turned out 2,277 Latino leaders from 46 grassroots institutions for nonpartisan/bilingual forums with all candidates for Sheriff in Wake, Durham, Orange, Forsyth and Mecklenburg counties. Those same leaders conducted nonpartisan get-out-the-vote efforts in their communities which resulted in the election of Sheriffs who ended collaboration with

ICE in their jurisdictions. Leaders of the Latino Congress conducted a relational voter program and distributed 46,000 pieces of nonpartisan educational materials among members of Latino institutions in Cumberland, Wake, Durham, Orange, Guilford, Forsyth, Mecklenburg and Buncombe counties.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Sex by Age (Hispanic or Latino), (2017), [https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17\\_5YR/B01001I/0400000US37](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/B01001I/0400000US37);

U.S. Census Bureau, Sex by Age, (2017), [https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17\\_5YR/B01001/0400000US37](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/B01001/0400000US37);

U.S. Census Bureau, Sex by Age by Nativity and Citizenship Status (Hispanic or Latino), (2017), [https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17\\_5YR/B05003I/0400000US37](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkkm/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/B05003I/0400000US37)

<sup>2</sup> Isela Gutiérrez-Gunter and Bob Hall, A Snapshot of Latino Voters in North Carolina, Democracy North Carolina, (July 2012), <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/snapshot-of-latino-voters-in-nc.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Mark Hugo Lopez, Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, Jens Manuel Krogstad, More Latinos Have Serious Concerns About Their Place in America Under Trump, Pew Research Center Hispanic Trends, (Oct. 25, 2018), <https://www.pewhispanic.org/2018/10/25/more-latinos-have-serious-concerns-about-their-place-in-america-under-trump/>

<sup>4</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstad, Antonio Flores, Mark Hugo Lopez, Key takeaways about Latino voters in the 2018 midterm elections, Pew Research Center, (Nov. 9, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/09/how-latinos-voted-in-2018-midterms/>

<sup>5</sup> Lulu Garcia-Navarro, Record Latino Turnout Was A Huge Factor In Democrats' Midterm Election Wins, National Public Radio (Dec. 16, 2018, 8:03 AM), <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/16/677157715/record-latino-turnout-was-a-huge-factor-in-democrats-midterm-election-wins>

<sup>6</sup> As noted in Democracy North Carolina's 2012 "Snapshot of Latino Voters in North Carolina," voter registration forms failed to include a "Hispanic or Latino" option until 2002. As a result, it is likely there are many more Latinx voters who may not be represented in the data below, including voters who have not updated their voter registration since 2002, voters who skipped the question on ethnic identity on their voter registration form, or voters who are listed at "Other" or "Unknown" in the voter registration database. The analysis below is based on voters who are designated "Hispanic or Latino" in North Carolina's voter data.

<sup>7</sup> Analysis by Democracy NC, data retrieved from North Carolina State Board of Elections, "voter\_stats\_20181106" and "history\_stats\_20181106," (November 6th, 2018), [https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=ENRS/2018\\_11\\_06/](https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=ENRS/2018_11_06/)

<sup>8</sup> Alamance, Buncombe, Chatham, Dare, Durham, Granville, Haywood, Jackson, Madison, Mitchell, Orange, Union, Wake, Watauga, Yancey

<sup>9</sup> Analysis by Democracy NC, data retrieved from North Carolina State Board of Elections, Registration Numbers and Analysis, "ncvoter\_statewide," as of June 8th, 2019, <https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=data/> and from North Carolina State Board of Elections, Voter Registration Statistics, <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/RegStat/>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.catalist.us/>

<sup>11</sup> Additional information about this estimate available upon request. As pointed out by NALEO researchers, who use Catalist data, "analysts identify Latino registered voters in the files through the use of independent software applications that generally utilize Spanish surnames and other demographic analysis to identify Latino registered voters. However, some individuals with Spanish surnames are not Latino, and some Latinos do not have Spanish surnames. Thus, Spanish surname software applications are subject to error because they do not capture a precise count of Latino registered voters, rather only those registered voters who possess a Spanish surname." [http://s143989.gridserver.com/downloads/2016/NALEO2016\\_PresidentialElections\\_6-20-16-FP.pdf](http://s143989.gridserver.com/downloads/2016/NALEO2016_PresidentialElections_6-20-16-FP.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Analysis by Democracy NC, data retrieved from North Carolina State Board of Elections, Registration Numbers and

- Analysis, “ncvoter\_statewide,” as of June 8, 2019, <https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=data/>;  
North Carolina State Board of Elections, Historical Registration Numbers, as of June 8, 2019. <https://vt.ncsbe.gov/Reg-Stat/>.
- <sup>15</sup> Analysis by Democracy NC, data retrieved from North Carolina State Board of Elections, “ncvoter\_statewide,” as of June 8th, 2019. <https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=data/>
- <sup>14</sup> National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), NALEO 2016 Latino Election Handbook, (June 20, 2016), [http://s143989.gridserver.com/downloads/2016/NALEO2016\\_PresidentialElections\\_6-20-16-FP.pdf](http://s143989.gridserver.com/downloads/2016/NALEO2016_PresidentialElections_6-20-16-FP.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Duplin, Lee, Sampson, Greene, Montgomery, Durham, Forsyth, Johnston, Hoke, Mecklenburg, Chatham, Wayne <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/demog/county-projections>
- <sup>16</sup> US Census Bureau, Hispanic or Latino Origin by Specific Origin, (2017), [https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17\\_5YR/B03001/0400000US37](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/B03001/0400000US37),  
US Census Bureau, Sex by Age and Nativity and Citizenship Status, (2017), [https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17\\_5YR/B050031/0400000US37](https://factfinder.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/17_5YR/B050031/0400000US37)
- <sup>17</sup> Analysis by Democracy NC, data retrieved from North Carolina State Board of Elections, “history\_stats\_20161108,” (Nov 8th, 2016). [https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=ENRS/2016\\_11\\_08/](https://dl.ncsbe.gov/?prefix=ENRS/2016_11_08/).
- <sup>18</sup> Allow Early Voting/Last Saturday/Flexibility. House Bill 893. Available at <https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2019/Bills/House/PDF/H893v1.pdf>.
- <sup>19</sup> Alexandra Forter Sirota, Luis Toleda, William Munn, and Patrick McHugh, The Cost of Creating Barriers to Vote, Budget and Tax Center (BTC) Report, (Sept 2018), <https://democracync.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/BTC-REPORT-photo-ID-2018.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> Department of Commerce v. New York, No. 18-966, 2019 WL 2619473 (U.S. June 27, 2019).  
Press Release, Democracy North Carolina, Democracy NC Responds to SCOTUS Ruling on Census Citizenship Question, (Jun. 27, 2019), <https://democracync.org/news/democracy-nc-responds-to-scotus-ruling-on-census-citizenship-question/>