



LATINO VOTER MOBILIZATION IN 2000

PREDICTORS OF LATINO TURNOUT



The Tomás Rivera
POLICY INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

Latino¹ voter turnout in the United States has increased dramatically within the past twenty years. In 1980, the number of Latinos who voted in this presidential year was 2.4 million.² This number slightly increased in 1984, as turnout reached the 3 million mark. By 1996, an additional 1.9 million were going to the polls, making the total impact of Latino turnout 4.9 million. By 2000, 5.5 million Latinos participated in the electoral process, doubling the amount of Latino turnout within a relatively short time span. When the number of registered Latino voters is considered, the potential impact of Latinos on the electoral process is even more pronounced. In the 1996 election, 75% of all Latinos that were registered to vote actually voted, suggesting that Latinos who register to vote will participate at high rates.

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These turnout figures suggest that Latinos have increased their registration efforts by capitalizing on their population growth, especially with those Latinos who are U.S. born or eligible for citizenship. However, this begs the question that within this group of registered voters, which Latinos are more likely to turnout on election day? What factors determine whether Latinos will arrive at the polls?

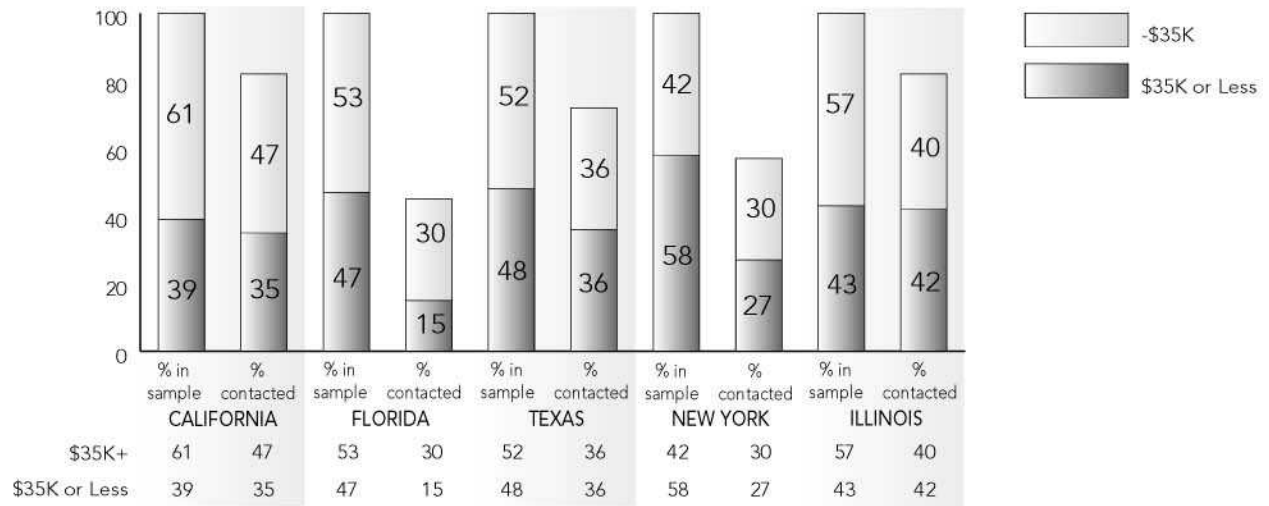
Political scientists have long examined voting, and they conclude that two factors are most influential on turnout, which are highly related to each another: (1) a voter's socio-economic status, and (2) whether or not the individual was asked to vote. With respect to the first factor, individuals with more resources available to them, such as time, money, and skills, are able to engage in political activity. In addition, it has also been suggested that individuals participate in the political process as a result of how strategic mobilization efforts of political parties, campaigns, interest groups, and candidates interact with targeted citizens. Mobilization efforts focus on people who are centrally located within the social networks surrounding these institutions. Thus, inclusion in a mobilization network is not a random process; instead, it is highly structured by several characteristics related to factors like income and education. Consequently, people with lower socio-economic status are less likely to be asked to get involved.³

¹ We use the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" interchangeably.

² TRPI Estimates, July 1999. Based on US Census Voter Turnout Estimates.

³ S. Verba, K. Schlozman, and D. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*, 1995.

FIGURE 1:
MOBILIZATION BY INCOME



These insights provide the foundation that allows researchers to determine the manner in which Latinos are mobilized. Following the 2000 election, the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) conducted a telephone survey of approximately 2,000 Latino registered voters from California, New York, Florida, Illinois, and Texas. A variety of questions that primarily dealt with their political attitudes and opinions, as well as their demographic characteristics, were asked. The data from this survey provided clear answers to the question posed at the onset of this brief, “which Latinos are likely to turn out on election day?”

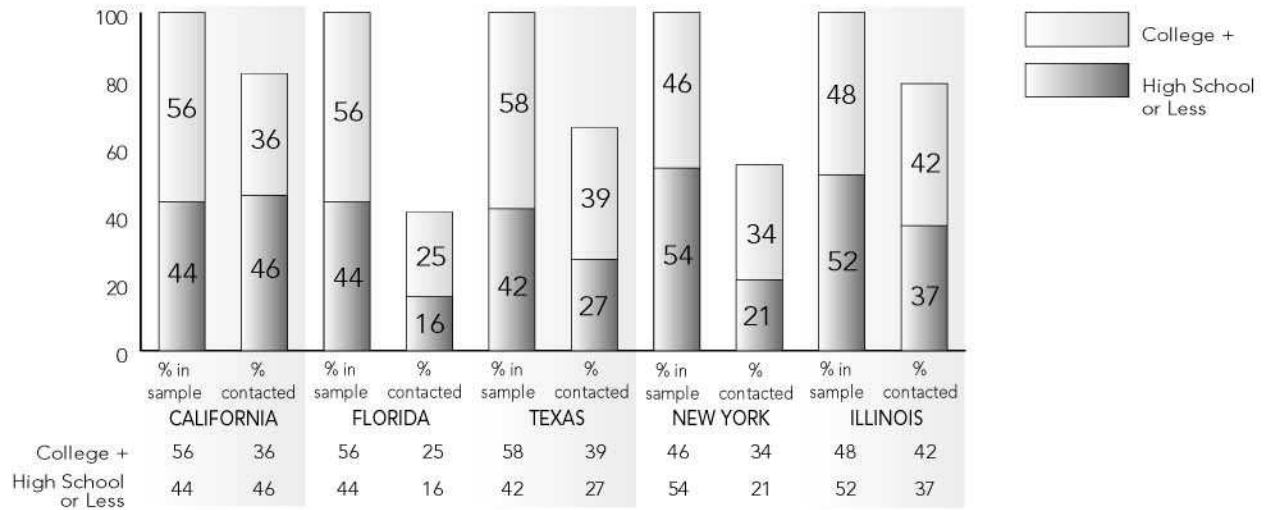
In order to determine which Latinos were mobilized, the degree in which Latinos were contacted was examined first, taking into account their income, education, and age. The differences between Latinos who were contacted and those who were not, with respect to the variables mentioned above, were standardized and compared. Whether or not those

Latinos who were asked to vote actually showed up at the polls on election day was also considered.

Which Latinos Were Mobilized?

TRPI researchers found that efforts at mobilizing Latino citizens are biased toward people who are in higher socio-economic status brackets. This indicates that Latinos, similar to the mainstream electorate, are strategically targeted and mobilized by political leaders and socio-political groups, based on these demographic characteristics. Moreover, analysis indicates that mobilization efforts vary across the five states. Since mobilization serves as a catalyst for voting participation, different turnout rates in the five states are due to different levels of mobilization, all other things being equal.

FIGURE 2:
MOBILIZATION BY EDUCATION



Mobilization by Income

A Latino's income level greatly determines whether or not they will be asked to vote. Overall, Latinos who earn more than \$35,000 were contacted more than others, by margins of 15 percentage points (FL) to 12 percentage points (CA) to 2 percentage points (IL) and no difference in Texas. Figure 1 shows that 61 percent of California respondents earned \$35,000 or more. Of these, 47 percent were contacted. On the other hand, in California, 39 percent of respondents earned less than \$35,000 and only 35 percent of them were contacted.

Mobilization by Education

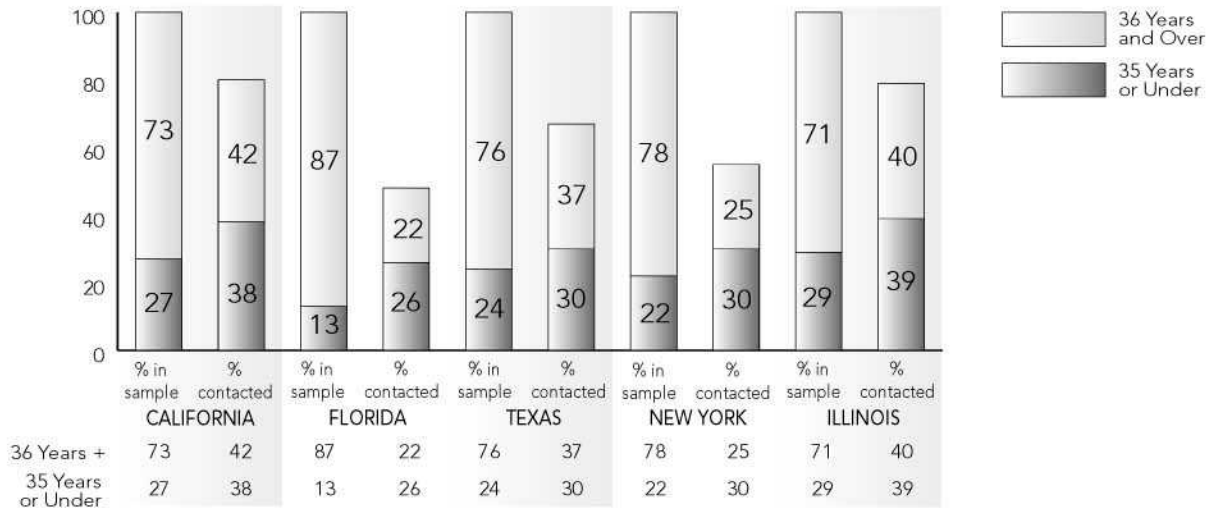
Mobilization also targeted the more educated voter in Florida, Texas, New York and Illinois; in California the less educated bracket was the most contacted, but not to the same degree as income. Figure 2 shows

that overall, greater proportions of higher educated Latinos were contacted than those with less education. In Texas, college-educated individuals were contacted by rates of 39 percent, while those with high school degrees were only contacted 27 percent of the time. This trend is also evident in Illinois, Florida and New York, given that more highly educated voters are more likely to be contacted than those with less education, in those states.

Mobilization by Age

Age also affected the chances of being contacted. Older voters were contacted more, by margins ranging from 1 percentage point (IL) to 7 percentage points (TX). In Florida and New York, age was biased toward the younger population. Under-35 voters were contacted at margins of 4 percent in Florida, while in New York the margin is slightly higher at 5 percent. These numbers are presented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3:
MOBILIZATION BY AGE



Are These Mobilization Trends Random?

To determine whether contact is really dependent on income, education, and age, and not just an artifact of coincidence, TRPI examined the proportion of respondents contacted within age, education, and income groups versus the proportion of respondents who would have been contacted if respondents had been contacted in a statistically random manner. That is, if no particular groups were targeted, the expected probability of being contacted within each age, education, and income group would not be different from the overall rate of contact. The data in Table 1 do indeed confirm that these trends are not coincidental. In fact, higher-income (CA, FL, NY) more-educated (FL, TX, NY, Ill) and older groups (TX, CA) were contacted more than the states' registered voters in general, while lower-income, less educated, and younger groups were contacted at lower rates for

those states in which this situation is true. For instance, in Florida the less educated were contacted less than the state average of all voters (-5%), as well as those with lower income (-8.3%). In Illinois, Latinos with incomes below \$35,000 were over-contacted by 1.6% and in California, Latinos were under-contacted by -7%. Latinos with a high school education, relative to those with college degrees, were also contacted less than the expected state average in Florida, Texas, New York and Illinois. In Texas, lower education produced a -7% margin between the expected and contacted groups, and in New York the margin was similar at -6.3%. These patterns reveal that Latinos on the lower end of the socio-economic bracket were contacted at lower rates than the state average of all voters.

One might expect that political parties and/or campaigns would most likely target Latinos on the upper end of the socio-economic scale. This notion did indeed come to fruition, and in fact, these Latinos

TABLE 1:
RESPONDENT UNDER OR OVER CONTACTED

	CALIFORNIA	FLORIDA	TEXAS	NEW YORK	ILLINOIS
	% respondent under/over contacted	% respondent under/over contacted	% respondent under/over contacted	% respondent under/over contacted	% respondent under/over contacted
INCOME					
~\$35K	-7.0 %	-8.3 %	0.2 %	-1.1 %	1.6 %
\$35K+	4.6 %	7.2 %	-0.2 %	1.6 %	-1.1 %
EDUCATION					
~High School	5.7 %	-5.0 %	-7.0 %	-6.3 %	-2.4 %
College +	-4.5 %	3.9 %	5.2 %	7.2 %	2.6 %
AGE					
~35	-2.9 %	4.0 %	-5.6 %	3.9 %	-0.5 %
36+	1.1 %	-0.6 %	1.7 %	-1.1 %	0.2 %

Note: -% = under-contacted and +% = over-contacted

were over-contacted in a majority of the five states. In Florida, Latinos over \$35,000 were over-contacted by margins of 7.2%. This is not true for Texas because in that state Latinos were under-contacted by -0.2%. Likewise, high income earning Latinos in California were over-targeted by 4.6%. These patterns are also evident for college-educated Latinos, which, in all states except for California, were over-contacted by margins ranging from 2.6% to 7.2%.

As stated earlier, if registered voters are contacted in a random manner, the proportion of any group contacted within the sample should be equal to the group's proportion in the sample. This is not the case, and lower-income, less-educated, and younger groups are contacted less than is predicted based on random selection. Meanwhile higher-income (CA, FL, NY), more-educated (FL, TX, NY, IL), and older groups (TX, CA) are contacted at higher rates than predicted by random selection. These findings further support the argument that mobilization efforts are biased toward

Latinos who are already likely to vote, and also reveal that political parties and campaigns are strategic when they target Latino voters.

Will Latinos Who Are Asked to Vote Turnout on Election Day?

While these findings support the contention that Latinos with higher income and more education are targeted as likely voters, the question still remains whether these individuals will actually vote on election day. The results of our survey data indicate that this certainly is the case. For higher income Latinos, being contacted made them more likely to vote, relative to Latinos in the lower income bracket. Moreover, as we would expect, Latinos who both were contacted and possessed a college education or beyond voted at higher rates than their less educated counterparts. Findings on mobilization efforts suggest that being asked to vote has a

positive impact on turnout. This statement is most especially true for Latinos who are already considered to be likely voters, that is, those with more education and higher income.

The results above demonstrate that contact increases a Latino's likelihood of voting. Researchers were interested in examining from the pool of Latinos who voted the percentage of those that were contacted. This examination was continued based on educational and income differences. Despite income differences, the percentage of Latinos who voted increased when they were contacted, and this number increased to an even higher degree when another Latino contacted them. For those in the lower-income bracket, voting increased by a margin of 10% when they were contacted by a Latino, and more affluent Latinos also voted at higher rates of 9% when a fellow Latino contacted them, all of this being compared with not being asked to vote.

The importance of being asked to vote, and most notably by a co-ethnic, is also evident when Latino turnout by education is evaluated. For Latinos in both education groups, being contacted increased voting by a small margin of 2%. These results imply that education does not seem to be as powerful as income on the impact of being asked to vote on Latino turnout. Turnout was most influenced by being asked to vote by another Latino.

The impact of mobilization on Latino turnout was further analyzed by using a logistic regression. Findings indicate that turnout varies by state, and this suggests that the institutional arrangement variations within each state are important in determining turnout. This may be because those who are asked to vote are the ones with the highest propensity to vote, for they possess the socio-economic characteristics that make them more inclined to participate. This

analysis also revealed that older, higher-income, and more educated Latino were more likely to vote. Moreover, logistic analysis indicated that Mexicans in both Texas and Illinois increase their likelihood of voting when a Latino contacts them.

Implications for the Future

Latino mobilization efforts in the 2000 elections targeted those most likely to vote, i.e., the richer, more educated, and older registered voters. The data suggest that mobilization efforts were exerted according to income, followed by age, then education—with some variations among states. Compared to the other states, mobilization in California, Florida, and Illinois is least biased toward older voters, suggesting that Latinos in these states had the same opportunity to be contacted regardless of age, while in other states Latinos were targeted differentially based on income, education, and age. However, the majority of Latino registered voters are those least likely to vote, i.e., the younger, poorer, and less educated. The 2000 Latino outreach effort, consequently, appears to have done little to increase overall Latino participation among the many citizens who are least likely to vote. In order to capitalize on the size of the Latino population, mobilization efforts must be able to effectively reach out to all registered voters, and not just those with higher socio-economic indicators.

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Mission Statement

Founded in 1985, The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute advances critical, insightful thinking on key issues affecting Latino communities through objective, policy-relevant research, and its implications, for the betterment of the nation.

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