Post-analysis of the 2012 November election has drawn considerable discussion around the current strength and future impact of the Latino vote, both nationally and in California. Much of this attention has focused on what demographic changes might mean to the growth of the Latino vote and for the Latino proportion of the electorate.

From 2000 to 2011, California’s Latino population increased by 3.4 million (31%), nearly ninety percent of the state’s total population growth (3,820,264), during that time.1 By July, 2013, Latinos are projected to reach parity with whites with regard to their share of the state’s general population. Latinos will comprise nearly 39% of the state’s total population - 14.8 million. (California Department of Finance). This is testament to the dramatic change in California’s demographic landscape over the last decade.

However, population gains do not automatically translate into an increase in voter representation for Latinos. It is important to identify how the previous decade’s Latino population growth affected California’s electorate and what the potential strength of the Latino vote (the Latino share of those who actually vote in elections) might be going forward. This brief examines the following questions utilizing actual California voter records.

1. How did the Latino vote change in California over the last decade?
2. What impact have Latinos had on political party representation in California?
3. How might the state’s future demographic changes affect the Latino share of California’s electorate and, thus the state’s general electorate, as a whole?

From 2002 to 2010, the Latino vote grew 67.1% (671,510) in absolute numbers, outpacing the 37% growth (2,712,082), in the overall vote during the same period.3 This performance for Latinos resulted in a large and steady increase through the decade (for comparable presidential and midterms elections) in the Latino share of the state’s total votes cast. For midterm elections, the Latino share of the vote is smaller - meaning comparably fewer Latinos show up at the polls for Congressional and local elections. In 2012, we estimate Latinos comprised 19.7% of the state’s vote, increasing their share more than a percentage point over 2008 and almost 4 percentage points from 2004.

But disparities in electoral participation still exist for Latinos. Their share of California’s vote is not representative compared to their share of the state’s overall population, nor is it equal to their share of the state’s citizen voting eligible population. At 19.7%, the 2012 Latino share of California’s overall vote remains far below the 26.3% (6,199,264) Latino share of the state’s 2012 CVAP and far below the 39% Latino share of the state’s total population.
Latinos are underrepresented in their share of California’s vote because they both register and turnout to vote at rates much lower than the non-Latino electorate. These disparate trends have been historically consistent and are the case, again, for 2012 election.

From 2002 through 2010, Latino registered turnout increased for every midterm and presidential election. However, these increases were not as high as increases in non-Latino registered turnout. Indeed, in the 2002 midterm election, there was a 12.1 percentage point gap between Latino and non-Latino turnout, but by the 2010 midterm election the gap grew to 15.7 percentage points. In presidential elections, we see a similar story unfold. In 2004, there was a 9.9 percentage point gap between Latino and non-Latino registered turnout and we estimate that gap grew to 11.6 percentage points in 2012. Interestingly, the turnout of registered Latinos declined in 2012 (over 2008) despite continued strong increases in Latino registration. The 2012 Latino voter registration rate (the percent of voting eligible Latino citizens that were registered) was 65.7%. From 2008 to 2012, Latino voter registration grew approximately 14% in absolute numbers but without a corresponding increase in the actual number of Latinos voting. Please see CCEP policy brief #1 for an analysis of Latino voter registration rates for 2002-2010.

### 2012 Eligible Turnout

Among all eligible voters (defined here as citizen of voting age), we estimate California turnout was only 53.5% for the 2012 election – meaning almost half of the state’s eligible voters did not vote. This turnout rate is a decrease over 2008 where 58.9% of the general eligible population turned out to vote. With the exception of 2012, eligible turnout rates for the general population have steadily increased (like their registered turnout rates) throughout the decade, from 2002-2010.

Breaking down California’s 2012 general vote, there is dramatic variation in eligible turnout between Latinos and non-Latinos. 2012 Latino eligible turnout was only 39.4%, while eligible non-Latinos turned out at a rate of 57.3% - an almost 20 percentage point disparity in electoral participation for Latinos. Latino and non-Latino eligible turnout both steadily increased over the decade, until 2012. The 2012 Latino eligible turnout rate declined from 2008’s mark of 44.9%. This is due to an increase in the number of Latino citizens (800,000) over 2008, while the total number of Latino voters stayed about the same.

Additionally, across the state’s counties there is an even greater contrast in eligible Latino turnout. By and large, California counties with the lowest eligible Latino turnout are geographically clustered together, creating regional patterns of underrepresentation for Latinos. Regions with the greatest disparity in eligible Latino turnout also have some of the poorest social and economic outcomes for Latinos, especially Latino youth. Overall, the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles and the Northstate regions have the lowest eligible Latino turnout rates. By contrast, Latinos of the Bay Area region are voting in higher rates than Latinos in the rest of the state. We detail these geographic disparities in our forthcoming work on the California Latino vote - CCEP policy brief #7.
**2: WHAT IMPACT HAVE LATINOS HAD ON POLITICAL PARTY REPRESENTATION IN CALIFORNIA?**

In California, Republicans have long turned out to vote in higher rates than Democrats and those registered as No Party Preference (NPP). This pattern was repeated in 2012. In 2012, Republican turnout was 73.7%, Democratic was 71.3% and NPP at 60%. When we separate out party turnout for Latinos from that of non-Latinos, we see very different turnout patterns. For non-Latinos, the voter turnout of those registered Republican has outpaced the turnout of those registered Democrat for every election (presidential and midterm, although by only a very slim margin in 2008), over the past decade. In contrast, Latinos registered as Democrats turned out at higher rates than Latino Republicans and by wider margins.

**2008 vs. 2012 Party Turnout**

In 2012, general voter turnout declined from 2008 across Democratic, Republican and NPP registered voters. This was the case for both Latinos and non-Latinos, but it is non-Latino Republicans that experienced the smallest decline. Specifically, 2012 Latino and non-Latino Democratic turnout declined from 2008 at 8 percentage points and 6.6 percentage points, respectively, whereas Latino and non-Latino Republican turnout declined over 2008 by 6.8 percentage points and 4.3 percentage points each. 2012 NPP registered voters experienced a much higher decrease in voter turnout over 2008 — 11.4 percentage points for Latinos and 9 percentage points for non-Latinos. Interestingly, non-Latino Republican and Democratic turnout was nearly equivalent in 2008 (80.4% and 80.2%, respectively).
Decline in Latino Democratic Voters

Despite lower overall registered voter turnout levels, general Democratic voters have a much larger influence on California's electorate due to the fact that they are more numerous in the state. While the Democratic share of the vote has remained essentially steady at 45%, the Republican share of the state's general vote has significantly declined, from 40% in 2002 to 31.2% in 2012. There was a 14 percentage point gap between the parties in 2012. It is the NPP voters that have been increasing their share of the general vote throughout the decade, from 10.6% in 2002 to 17.9% in 2012.

Over the last decade in California, substantially more Latino voters were registered Democratic over Republican and NPP. In contrast to general voters and non-Latino voters, this Democratic dominance for Latinos has actually declined by seven percentage points during this period, from 66.4% in 2002 to 59.2% in 2012. Similarly, the Republican share of the state’s Latino vote has also declined during the decade, from 20.5% in 2002 to 18.1% in 2012—a 41 percentage point gap in the Latino vote between the parties in 2012. While Latinos have decreased their proportion of actual voters who are registered with the two major parties, they have steadily increased the proportion of their voters registered as NPP. These NPP voters now makeup 17.5% of all Latino voters, up from just 10.1% in 2002.

Party Share of the Vote: Without Latino Voters

What would the political party share of the California vote look like without Latino voters? Without Latinos in the electorate, the voter gap between Democrats and Republicans narrows to just 6.7 percentage points in 2012. For most of the last decade, there would have only been a small difference in the major party share of the state's vote when subtracting out Latino voters (the non-Latino vote), with Republican voters actually comprising a slightly higher proportion of non-Latino voters in 2002.

Looking over the decade's voting trends, it is clear that Latino voters have been a key contributor to the dominance of the Democratic party in California's general vote. They are the margin of victory for many Democratic candidates.
3: HOW MIGHT THE STATE’S FUTURE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AFFECT THE LATINO SHARE OF CALIFORNIA’S ELECTORATE?

Strong Citizen Population Growth: More Future Latino Voters

Any assessment of what the future of California’s voting electorate might look like requires projecting changes both in the state’s total population and the state’s citizen voting age population (CVAP). Just as the Latino population has grown by huge numbers over the last decade, Latinos are projected to continue their population growth by large percentages for many decades into the future. From 2010 to 2040, California’s total population growth is projected at 27.8%, while the Latino population is projected to grow 52.6% over the same period. Latinos will comprise 71.2% of the state’s total growth over these three decades. By 2040, Latinos are projected to comprise 45% of California’s total population.

California’s citizen voting age population is also growing (those citizen eligible to vote). Total CVAP growth is projected at 38.2%, from 2010 to 2040, with Latino CVAP growing 106.9%. Latinos are also projected to comprise 71% of the state’s total CVAP growth, over the same 30 years. By 2040, Latinos are projected to make up 37.9% of the state’s total CVAP population. Over these three decades, the gap between the Latino proportion of the total population and the Latino proportion of the citizen voting age population narrows. This is due, in part, to the large Latino citizen youth population becoming of voting age.

Note: These are straight line CVAP projections developed by the California Department of Finance for the California Civic Engagement Project. These projections are based on assumptions that birth rates, death rates, and immigration rates follow current trends under existing laws. If immigration rates change beyond what is currently expected, these assumptions may over or understate population growth.8

By 2040, Latinos are projected to more than double their citizen voting age population, making up 70% of the state’s total citizen voting age growth. Strong population growth will bring significant opportunities for future Latino voters.
Projecting the Latino Vote: A Preliminary Exercise for Discussion

Since the November 2012 election, many analysts and commentators have attempted to assess how large the Latino vote might grow. For the purposes of informing these discussions further, we engaged in a qualified exercise identifying the projected growth of the Latino vote through 2040. For ease of discussion and analysis, we utilized two eligible turnout rates for Latinos to hold constant through this period: the current 2012 Latino eligible turnout rate and the 2012 eligible turnout rate for non-Latinos.

Given projected increases in California’s total and Latino citizen voting age populations, if Latinos were to keep their current eligible turnout rate of 39.4% steady (of course, in reality we would expect many fluctuations) through 2040, their percent of the state’s vote would still rise considerably. We project that Latinos would move from 19.7% of the state’s vote in 2012 to nearly 30% of the vote in 2040. These projections show the increased influence Latinos could have on the state’s vote solely driven by their increases in the citizen voting population.

Alternatively, if the Latino eligible turnout rate were able to achieve parity (a goal that has not yet been achieved in any statewide election) with the rest of the state’s voters, we project that the Latino share of the voting electorate would rise considerably more. A 2012 eligible turnout rate for Latinos of 57.3% (the 2012 non-Latino eligible turnout rate) would have translated to Latinos achieving 26.3% of the vote in 2012. If this rate were held steady for Latinos through 2040 then Latinos would rise to 37.9% of the state’s total voters. Additionally, bringing Latinos to the same eligible turnout rate makes their share of the vote equal to their share of the eligible citizen voting age population—meaning that California would finally have a voting electorate representative of its citizens (of course, the Latino total population would still be underrepresented in the electorate due to their lower citizenship levels). We detail geographic disparities in the projected Latino vote within California in our forthcoming work—CCEP policy brief #7.

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Note: This exercise utilized straight line CVAP projections that consider proportional differences in the youth and citizen population for Latinos in California. By projecting to 2040, we are capturing the “coming of age” of the younger Latino population, which represents the largest potential growth ever experienced in the Latino electorate.

Additionally, we know that youth are less likely to participate than older citizens. However, levels of education and family income among Latinos are expected to increase and these two demographic factors are primary predictors of political participation (in general and Latino turnout). In order to more accurately project the detailed vote among eligible Latinos in California, future projections will be made considering detailed turnout rates by age, education and income, as well as increases in the levels of education and income among Latinos. Future voter projections may also consider the % naturalized vs. % native-born among Latino CVAP and their variation in eligible voter turnout rates.
The dramatic growth in the California Latino citizen population over the next three decades will bring significant opportunities for increasing Latino voter registration and turnout. The “coming of age” of the formidable Latino youth population represents the largest potential growth ever experienced in California’s Latino electorate. This has dramatic implications for the growth of the state’s Latino political voice, particularly in light of the expected higher levels of education and family income among Latinos.

However, with more opportunities come more challenges for those working to increase Latino electoral participation. A higher proportion of citizen Latinos translates into more potential voters, but if these newly eligible Latinos are not converted to actual voters, commensurate to their increasing proportions of the state’s total CVAP, then Latino eligible turnout rates could actually decrease.

This successful transition depends on effective political education and mobilization, particularly as Latino voters are still more likely to be younger, less educated and of lower income than non-Latinos. As we have seen from the 2012 decline in Latino registered turnout, simply increasing voter registration does not automatically translate into higher voter turnout for Latinos.

**Identifying Latino Non-Voters**

Where the Latino vote lags within California (either in absolute numbers and/or percentages) can be strategic areas of opportunity to increase Latino voice. Addressing sub-state geographic disparities is key to increasing the Latino share of the state’s electorate. In an upcoming policy brief on California’s Latino vote, we will present geographically detailed voting projections in order to provide additional insight into identifying the location and characteristics of future eligible Latino non-voters (as increases in the Latino citizen population will vary significantly in magnitude and timeline across the state’s geography). With these findings, we will examine institutional barriers contributing to low Latino voter participation, including those that disproportionately impact the ability of young Latinos to first enter into the electorate. Considering the state’s future demographic changes, achieving a fully participating Latino electorate will be a critical and necessary step to realizing a fully representative and robust democratic system for California.

*Please see the CCEP website for data tables on 2002-2012 voter turnout.*
NOTES


2 Voter data was acquired from the Statewide Database and aggregated to the county and state level. These data are the state’s actual registration and voter records and not representative samples. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. For the 2002-2010 general election voter data, all 58 of California’s counties are included in the data. Please note that preliminary 2012 voter data comprise 15 of California’s counties: Alameda, Amador, Contra Costa, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Mateo, and Tehama. These counties make up over 70% of the state’s total and Latino populations and their Latino voter rates are representative of the state totals in each previous election year from 2002-2010. Estimates for 2012 voter turnout rates were produced based on these data. Final data findings for 2012 will be released in the CCEP’s upcoming Latino policy brief.

3 Latinos are distinguished in the data from the general population by the use of Spanish surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish surnames. The Passel-Word Spanish surname list, published by the US Census Bureau, was utilized to identify Latinos. Surname matching is not reliable for white, non-Hispanic, and African-American populations, and thus, registration data is not available for these groups. Note: Some additional Latinos may be registered to vote and not flagged by the surname databases. For more information on methodology and limitations, please see: http://swdb.berkeley.edu/d10/Creating%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf.

4 Percent voted of the eligible population is measured using citizen voting age population data from the United States Census Bureau 2000 Decennial Census (for 2002 eligible turnout) and from the American Community Survey (for 2008, 2010 and 2012 eligible turnout). ACS data are 1 year estimates. For more information on the limitations of the data, please see: http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/resources/voter-registration-data. Note: The 2012 and 2008 total eligible voter turnout rates and the 2008 Latino eligible voter turnout rate presented in this brief reflect small revisions made after the brief’s initial release.

5 Regions defined to include the following counties. Sacramento Region: Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba; San Francisco Region: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin; Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma; LA Region: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura; San Joaquin Valley: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Kern, Tulare; North State: Butte, Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou, Humboldt, Shasta; Central Coast: Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara; San Diego: San Diego.

6 No Party Preference (NPP) includes all registrants identified in California Secretary of State’s registration records as decline to state or no party affiliation. We do not present data for “Other Party” registrants in this brief.

7 These are turnout rates by the registered party affiliation of voters. State voter records do not identify which candidate and/or party for which an individual voter actually voted. Although not common for most of the electorate, voters do sometimes vote differently than their party affiliation.

8 Straight line CVAP projections developed by the California Department of Finance for the California Civic Engagement Project. These projections are based on assumptions that birth rates, death rates, and immigration rates follow current trends under current laws. If immigration rates change beyond what is currently expected, these assumptions may over or underestimate population growth. If there are any significant changes in immigration, birth, or death rates, projections will need to be adjusted accordingly. For more information on the CVAP projections, see the CCEP website: http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep. For more information on the base population projections please consult: http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/projections/P-1/documents/Projections_Methodology_2013.pdf. Note: Population projections presented in the map on page 5 of this brief reflect small revisions made after the brief’s initial release.

9 See work such as: DeSipio, 1996, 2004, Hero and Campbell, 1996; Pew Hispanic Center, 2004. Note: Voter projections presented in the map on page 6 of this brief reflect small revisions made after the brief’s initial release.

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The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a new nonpartisan data repository and research initiative for the state of California housed at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. The CCEP seeks to address the limited quality and quantity of publicly available civic engagement data. Its mission is to collect and curate civic engagement data from a broad range of sources, making them a publicly available resource to all interested audiences, including political researchers, public officials, advocacy groups and communities themselves. A key focus of data analysis is identifying disparities in participation across place and population. The CCEP’s research is intended to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in California and across its metropolitan and rural regions. The CCEP invites research and outreach partnerships from interested audiences.

For more information about the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, Project Director, at 530-665-3010 or msromero@ucdavis.edu. Visit our website at: http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep.

Launched in 2007, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change is dedicated to producing research that informs the building of healthy, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable regions in California. To accomplish this, the CRC builds two kinds of bridges. One set is on campus between faculty and students from different disciplines and departments; the other between the campus and regions throughout the state. These bridges allow us to bring together faculty, students and communities to collaborate on innovative action research that identifies and directs resources to communities struggling with the most challenging environmental and social conditions.