

Latino Population Growth, Political Clout, and the South, 2008

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This paper addresses the strong growth in the Latino population and the spreading political impact of that population growth in terms of recent presidential elections.¹ The South receives particular attention. For comparison some of the broader national implications will be discussed.

Among the questions addressed are the following. How did the Latino vote impact the elections in the South in 2008? Latinos have led the nation in population growth, accounting for half of the recent growth. To what degree and why has Latino political clout kept pace with the strong population growth?

The Latino Vote in the South in 2008

Exit polls suggest the Latino vote in 2008 proved influential to the outcomes of the general election in Florida and the Democratic primary in Texas, the only two southern states with sizable Latino populations. Hispanic voters in Florida favored Barack Obama despite the Cuban-American support for John McCain. In Hillary Clinton's primary win over Obama in Texas her strong Hispanic voter support there proved critical.

Nationally, Hispanics made up 9 percent of the general election voters and backed Obama over McCain 67 to 31 percent. Southern Hispanics showed marginally more support for McCain although in each of the three southern states for which Hispanic voter preferences are reported, Obama carried the Hispanic vote. In Texas Hispanics made up 20 percent of the voters and favored Obama 63 to 35 percent. Comparable figures for Florida are 14, 57, and 42 percent and for Virginia, 5, 65 and 34 percent, respectively. Elsewhere in the South, exit polls indicated the Hispanic vote share but not the Hispanic voter preferences: Hispanics were 2 percent of the voters in Tennessee; 3 percent in Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina; and 4 percent in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi.²

Despite a growing Hispanic population, neither Florida nor Texas had a greater Hispanic voter share in the 2008 general election than in 2004. Texas held steady with 20 percent, Florida Hispanics made up 15 percent in 2004, 14 percent in 2008.

Noteworthy was Obama's win of a majority of the Hispanic vote in Florida, a vote Cuban-Americans traditionally led into the Republican column. Obama carried the Hispanic vote in Florida by 57 to 42 percent, reversing Kerry's loss to Bush among Hispanics by 56 to 44 percent in 2004. While influential, the Hispanic vote switch was not decisive. The

¹ "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably in this paper. "White" and "black" refer to non-Hispanics in those racial categories.

² Exit poll data for 2008 are reported by the major broadcast networks, for example <http://abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/ExitPolls2008> for the general election and <http://abcnews.go.com/pollingunit/2008exitpolls/altindex> for the Democratic and Republican primaries and caucuses.

contrary claim has been made,³ but the arithmetic does not support the conclusion: even if McCain had duplicated Bush's support among Hispanics, Obama's million vote lead among Florida blacks would have overcome McCain's support among whites and (hypothetically) Hispanics to eke out a statewide win of about 30,000 votes of the 8.4 million cast. Obama's Hispanic support was strong but there were other reasons Obama carried Florida: registering 200,000 new voters, staffing 50 field offices, bringing in 600,000 volunteers, and spending \$40 million in the state.⁴

During the Democratic primaries and caucuses of 2008 Senator Obama seldom enjoyed the support of Hispanic voters. Nationally, Hispanics made up 12 percent of the voters in 39 Democratic primaries and caucuses and backed Clinton over Obama, 61 to 35 percent.⁵ The southern state of Virginia on February 12 was one of only 3 states in which Obama edged out Clinton for the Hispanic vote, 54-46.⁶

More typical of the state primary and caucus outcomes were the results for the Florida primary on January 29. The Democratic National Committee threatened sanctions against the state's national convention delegation for the unapproved, early timing of the primary. As a result, candidates did not campaign officially, rendering the political significance of the results uncertain. Clinton bettered Obama by 50 to 33 percent. Latino voters made up 12 percent of the voters, favoring Clinton over Obama by 59 to 30 percent.

Indeed, as the Democratic nomination heated up, some claimed Senator Obama's prospects for the nomination and the general election were imperiled by his failure to gain greater Hispanic support. On January 9, 2008, Sergio Bendixen, Clinton's Hispanic pollster, set off an uproar by suggesting Hispanics would not vote for blacks: "The Hispanic voter—and I want to say this very carefully—has not shown a lot of willingness or affinity to support black candidates."⁷ As one reporter noted, "Clinton supporters sometimes argue that their candidate is the more electable one because Hispanics will migrate to the G.O.P. or stay

³ Greg Bobrinsky, "The GOP's Growing Latino Problem," Real Clear Politics, November 12, 2008 http://www.realclearpolitics.com/printpage/?url=http://www.realclearpolitics.com/cross_tabs/2008/11/the_gops_growing_latino_proble.html.

⁴ Mary Ellen Klas, "Florida GOP: Obama won with our playbook," *Miami Herald*, November 8, 2008; and "Inside story: How Obama won Florida," *Miami Herald*, November 9, 2008.

⁵ "ABC News 2008 Democratic Primary Exit Poll Results – Key Groups," June 3, 2008 <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/08DemPrimaryKeyGroups.pdf>. Gary Langer provides this useful compilation combining state primary and caucus results, see "How the Primaries Rewrote the Script: Lessons for the Campaign Ahead, A Look Back on the 2008 Primary Season," ABC News, June 3, 2008 at <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=4987487>. In 29 Republican primaries and caucuses, Hispanics made up 6 percent of the voters and supported McCain with 46 percent. Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney both gained 19 percent Hispanic support. "ABC News 2008 Republican Primary Exit Poll Results – Key Groups," June 3, 2008 <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/08RepPrimaryKeyGroups.pdf>.

⁶ The other two states in which Obama won the Hispanic vote was his home state of Illinois (50-49) and Connecticut (53-43), both on February 5th.

⁷ Ryan Lizza, "The Political Scene: Minority Reports--After New Hampshire, a Hint of Racial Politics," *The New Yorker*, January 21, 2008 http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/01/21/080121fa_fact_lizza?printable=true.

home should Obama be the nominee.”⁸ Yet even during the Democratic primaries and caucuses, polling data indicated Hispanics would be solidly behind Obama if he were the Democratic nominee. Gallup’s daily tracking polls interviewed over 4,000 Hispanics from March through June, revealing that among this group Obama enjoyed about a two-to-one lead over McCain for the general election.⁹

The Texas Democratic primary on March 4 proved to be a critical showdown between Obama and Clinton, prolonging the contest rather than driving Clinton out of the race. Obama’s inability to defeat Clinton that day in either Ohio or Texas gave her campaign renewed viability. With hindsight, Obama’s campaign manager recognized that Texas was winnable and a win would have been critical. “The biggest mistake I made in this campaign: Texas. We lost the primary. If we had handled that two-week period differently, we might have been able to win the Texas primary, and the primaries would have been over.”¹⁰ One account of the 2008 elections referenced Clinton’s win over Obama in the Texas primary and noted, “That alone cost the [Obama] campaign \$40 million and three months of time.”¹¹

Clinton’s hold on the Hispanic vote proved critical to her win in Texas. She and Bill Clinton had, during George McGovern’s presidential bid in 1972, organized voters in the Hispanic areas of the state.¹² In Texas, Hispanics made up 32 percent of the Democratic primary voters (up from 24 percent in 2004) and backed Clinton over Obama 66 to 32 percent. Clinton won the state by 51 to 47 percent of the primary vote. (Had no Hispanic voted, Obama would have won with over 55 percent of the vote.) Other matters proved influential in Clinton’s win of Texas but strong Hispanic support furnished more than her margin of victory in the state.¹³

The Clinton-Obama contest for the Democratic nomination generated more interest than the struggle for the Republican nomination, as evidenced by Democratic primaries attracting almost 34 million voters to the Republicans’ 21 million.¹⁴

Likewise, more Hispanics took part in the Democratic primaries and caucuses than in the Republican ones in 2008, an outcome made more likely by the roughly two-to-one inclination of Hispanics to identify as Democrats rather than Republicans.¹⁵

⁸ James Traub, “The Way We Live Now: The Emerging Minority,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02wwln-lede-t.html>.

⁹ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Hispanic Voters Solidly behind Obama: Few demographic differences evident among Hispanics,” July 2, 2008 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/108532/Hispanic-Voters-Solidly-Behind-Obama.aspx?version>.

¹⁰ David Plouffe quoted in Dana Milbank, “Rough Sketch: Press Ban at the Press Club,” *Washington Post*, February 13, 2009 http://voices.washingtonpost.com/roughsketch/2009/02/press_ban_at_the_press_club.html.

¹¹ Dan Balz and Haynes Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election* (New York, New York: Viking, 2009), 220.

¹² Dan Balz, “Clinton’s Ties To Texas Run Long and Deep,” *Washington Post*, February 18, 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/17/AR2008021702460.html?wpisrc=newsletter>.

¹³ David Paul Kuhn, “Exit polls: Why Clinton won Texas primary,” March 5, 2008 <http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuiid=7D8EDC2D-3048-5C12-00B6BEBB272D7C94>.

¹⁴ *The Rhodes Cook Letter*, June 2008, 10-14.

What of the Hispanics participating in the Republican nomination process? In 29 Republican primaries and caucuses, Hispanics made up 6 percent of the voters and supported McCain with 46 percent of their vote. Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney each gained 19 percent Hispanic support. Exit poll data for Texas reveal Huckabee pressed McCain among Hispanic voters there. Hispanics made up 10 percent of the Texas Republican primary voters, 42 percent backed Huckabee, 47 percent McCain, and 5 percent Ron Paul. In Florida, Hispanics backed McCain decisively with 54 percent support, contrasted with 14 percent for Romney, and 7 percent for Huckabee. Hispanics made up 12 percent of the Florida Republican primary voters.¹⁶

The 2008 primary and general election results show Hispanics were a significant element of elections in Florida and Texas. In the rest of the South Hispanics are politically emerging. The discussion now turns to evidence for population growth and the political mobilization of Hispanics—past, present and future.

Latino Population Growth in the Nation and the South

About Hispanic population growth there can be no doubt. The total Hispanic population in the U.S. was 9 million in 1970, but rose to 46.9 million in 2008. In percentage terms, the Hispanic population increased from 4.5 percent of the U.S. population in 1970 to 15.4 percent in 2008.¹⁷ Census Bureau projections predict this strong increase will continue: by 2050, Hispanics will number 132.8 million, 30.2 percent of the projected total population.¹⁸

In recent years the Latino population in the South has mirrored these national trends, rising from 4.3 million in 1980 to 15.6 million in 2008 (7 percent to 16.5 percent of the total

¹⁵ Mark Hugo Lopez and Susan Minushkin, “2008 National Survey of Latinos: Hispanic Voter Attitudes,” Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, July 2008, iii <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/90.pdf>.

¹⁶ “ABC News 2008 Republican Primary Exit Poll Results – Key Groups.”

¹⁷ 1970: Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 To 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, for the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States, Population Division Working Paper No. 56, U.S. Census Bureau Washington, D.C., September 2002; 2008: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Table 4: Estimates of the Resident Population by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: July 1, 2008 (SC-EST2008-04), release date: May 14, 2009.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “An Older and More Diverse Nation by Midcentury,” August 14, 2008 <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/population/012496.html>. Hispanic population growth is fueled by immigration—both legal and illegal—but also by birth rates. With birth-right citizenship in the United States, that growth has dramatic political potential. Although recent Hispanic population gains have resulted more from immigration (both legal and illegal), the years immediately ahead may be ones in which the continuing Hispanic population growth will result less from immigration than child-bearing by U.S. Hispanic citizens. While first generation Hispanics (those born outside the U.S. who may be naturalized U.S. citizens, legal immigrants, or unauthorized migrants) dominated the Hispanic population growth between 1970 and 2000, the second generation (U.S. citizens, born in the U.S. but with at least one foreign born parent who may be a naturalized U.S. citizen, legal immigrant, or unauthorized migrant) is projected to dominate between 2000 and 2020. This rise of the second generation resulted from the high levels of immigration in the 1970s and 1980s. “The rise of the second generation is the result of births and immigration that have already taken place, and it is now an inexorable, undeniable demographic fact.” Robert Suro and Jeffrey S. Passel, “The Rise of the Second Generation: Changing Patterns in Hispanic Population Growth,” Pew Hispanic Center, October 14, 2003, 9 <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/22.pdf>.

population).¹⁹ Census Bureau data for 2008 show the Latino presence in the South is growing in all eleven southern states. Florida and Texas far out-distance the others in Latino populations: 21 and 36.5 percent respectively in 2008. The other nine states had Hispanic populations ranging from Mississippi's 2 percent to Georgia's 8 percent, with marked growth occurring in recent years.

Population Growth, but Political Clout?

The Hispanic population has surged, but the Hispanic vote has lagged, both in the nation and in the South. In recent elections the media have repeatedly rediscovered the potential Hispanic voter as a potential difference-maker. But these high expectations are repeatedly dashed as Hispanic political mobilization nudges rather than surges upward. As the scholars in the field put it, the repeated refrain is that this election year will be the one in which the sleeping giant of Hispanic political clout awakens. Such high expectations are confounded by the realities of the recent elections. The sleeping giant slumbers on, falling short of the hype and hope.²⁰

Figure 1 displays the divergence between the strong increase in Hispanic population and the much slower increase in Hispanic voters in presidential election years. Hispanic voters at the nation's polls, 2.1 million in 1972, increased to 9.7 million in the presidential election of 2008 as the total Hispanic population rose from about 10 million to 46.9 million.²¹ In the South, fewer than a million Hispanic voters in 1984 became 3.3 million by 2008 as the southern Hispanic total population rose from 4.3 million in 1980 to 15.6 million in 2008. Figure 2 contrasts the growing Hispanic population and voters in the South between 1996 and 2008—twelve years in which the Hispanic southern population rose from 8.9 to 15.6 million and the Hispanic voters in the South rose from 1.7 to 3.3 million. Figure 2 displays both midterm and presidential election years.

Why is the Hispanic voter share not growing to the extent one might expect in light of the growth in Hispanic population share? Major reasons for this Hispanic gap between vote

¹⁹ Nationally, Hispanics have emerged as the largest minority; surpassing non-Hispanic blacks (who made up 12.8 percent of the U.S. population in 2008). This population growth has not been clustered in the southwest or in traditional metropolitan areas of the country. Latinos have not concentrated in the traditional receiving areas but have dispersed in recent years, bringing a Latino population to areas that had none a couple of decades ago. See Rakesh Kochhar, Roberto Suro, and Sonya Tafoya, "The New Latino South: The Context and Consequences of Rapid Population Growth," Pew Hispanic Center, July 26, 2005

²⁰ Louis DeSipio and Rodolfo O. de la Garza, "Forever Seen as New: Latino Participation in American Elections," c. 20, 398-409, in Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Páez, *Latinos: Remaking America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2008, Current Population Report P20 series, Washington, D.C., July 2009 and earlier versions of this biennial publication. The report on the 1972 election is the first giving information on Hispanics (<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html>). For the mid-term election of 2006, see also Pew Hispanic Center, "The Latino Electorate: An Analysis of the 2006 Election" <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/34.pdf>

shares and population shares are straightforward: compared to non-Hispanics, proportionately more Hispanics are not citizens and larger shares of Hispanics are too young to vote. But even once we control for citizenship status and age, Hispanic voter registration and turnout rates still lag behind those of non-Hispanics.

Consider one reason for the gap between total population and voters among Hispanics—the younger age distribution of the Hispanic population. A larger proportion of Hispanics are under 18 than is the case for non-Hispanics so relatively more Hispanics are not yet old enough to vote. The Census Bureau estimated the U.S. Hispanic population as over 46.9 million in July 2008 (Table 1). Hispanics 18 years old or older numbered 30.9 million, or 65.7 percent of all Hispanics. Non-Hispanics numbered 257.1 million, of whom 194.6 million were of voting-age (75.7 percent). A smaller share of Hispanics relative to non-Hispanics is old enough to vote. This fact is reflected in the lower Hispanic share of the voting-age population (13.7 percent) compared to the Hispanic share of the total population (15.4 percent). The South resembles the nation with slight differences—the southern Hispanic population has a larger share of voting age persons than in the nation (70.3 to 65.7 percent) and the southern non-Hispanic population has marginally more under voting age than its national counterpart (74.2 to 75.7).

This youthfulness may seem self-correcting as young Hispanics age up. Yet even when that happens, new births should keep the overall age distribution in the Hispanic population relatively younger than in the non-Hispanic population, thus the Hispanic population is likely to contain larger shares of those too young to vote.

Another reason for this divergence between the Hispanic population and voters involves citizenship—noncitizens make up a large proportion of the Hispanic population in the U.S. Many Hispanic non-citizens are here legally, others are not. The Census Bureau surveys individuals about citizenship status but does not determine whether noncitizens are in the country illegally. Census figures for 2008 establish that 61 percent of the Hispanic population was born in the U.S. and were thus citizens. Another 11 percent of the Hispanic population was foreign-born but have become U.S. citizens through naturalization. The remaining 28 percent of Hispanics are foreign-born, non-U.S. citizens. Some in this 28 percent are here legally.²²

Estimates of “unauthorized migrants” or “illegal immigrants” vary, but Jeff Passel and of the Pew Hispanic Center estimates that in March 2008 there were 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants. Approximately 76 percent of these were Hispanic. This would suggest that in

²² U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2008, Table 7: Nativity and Citizenship Status by Sex, Hispanic Origin, and Race: 2008. Internet release date: September 2009. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/cps2008.html>

2008 perhaps one-fourth of the Hispanic population was in the U.S. illegally.²³ The same source estimates that the eleven southern states had 4.1 million unauthorized migrants in 2008, suggesting that, similarly to the nation, about one-fourth of the southern Hispanic population was in the U.S. illegally.

Table 1 also indicates that citizenship rates for Hispanics and non-Hispanics differ dramatically: only 63.3 percent of the nation's Hispanics of voting-age are citizens, contrasted with 95.8 percent of non-Hispanics. Again, the South is essentially similar, although both Hispanics and non-Hispanics are slightly more likely to be citizens in the South. These lower citizenship rates depress Hispanic mobilization.

Yet these non-citizenship rates and a younger age distribution do not explain all of the divergence between the size of the total population and the number of voters among Hispanics. Notice that after taking into account differential citizenship rates and age distribution, a sizable gap remains. Table 1 also shows that lower registration and turnout rates among Hispanics compared to non-Hispanics make a substantial impact on Hispanic mobilization. An analysis of registration and turnout rates of the citizen voting-age population shows that Hispanics lag here as well. Hispanic registration equals 59.4 percent of the national citizen voting-age population compared with 72.2 percent among non-Hispanics; 49.9 percent of the Hispanic citizen-voting age population voted in 2008, compared to 65.1 percent of the non-Hispanics. The South exhibits a very similar pattern in terms of registration but both Hispanics and non-Hispanics in the South are less likely to vote than their national counterparts.

Considering voting-age population shares, citizenship rates, registration rates and turnout rates reveals that at each of these points, Hispanic political mobilization suffers relative to non-Hispanics.

To understand the impact of these differential voting-age population shares, citizenship rates, registration rates and turnout rates, consider an equal population of Hispanics and non-Hispanics, say 1,000 of each group, and apply the national rates detailed above for 2008 to determine how many voters are likely to result out of each group (Table 2). The initially equal population of 1,000 becomes unequal as we factor in the more youthful Hispanic population, yielding 657 Hispanics of voting-age ($1,000 * .6570$) and 757 non-Hispanics ($1,000 * .7570$). The citizenship differential widens the inequality even more:

²³ Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn. "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center, April 2009, i, 30 <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf>. By law non-citizens do not have the right to vote. Of course, law and practice can differ. One anecdote tells the story of a southern governor who approached a Mexican consular official after a presentation on the greater presence of Mexicans in the U.S. The governor, a Democrat, desired to get this group more involved in politics and voting. The consulate noted that many of this new population were not citizens, to which the governor is reported to have replied, "Not a problem!" State legislative debates over voter identification requirements reflect noncitizen voting as more of a potential than an actual problem.

producing 416 Hispanic citizens of voting age ($657 * .6330$) and 725 non-Hispanics ($757 * .9580$). Registration rates reduce the numbers farther: revealing 247 Hispanic citizens of voting age are registered ($416 * .5940$) and 524 non-Hispanics ($725 * .7220$). Turnout rates produce 208 Hispanic voters ($247 * .8400$) and 472 non-Hispanic voters ($524 * .9010$). Starting with an initially equal population of 1,000 in each group and factoring in only age, citizenship, registration, and turnout rates from 2008 yields a result in which non-Hispanic voters outnumber Hispanic voters by a ratio of 2.3 to 1.

Southern figures for voting-age population shares, citizenship rates, registration rates and turnout rates tell a similar story, winding up with a three more Hispanic voters (211) but nine fewer non-Hispanic voters (463). Still, the number of non-Hispanic voters is a sizable 2.2 times larger than the number of Hispanic voters.

With nothing fancier than simple arithmetic, one could take Table 2, assume Hispanic rates matched non-Hispanic rates (or some other figure) for one or more dimensions, and calculate the difference such a change in a rate would make. The greatest difference in the Hispanic vote would be made by equal citizenship rates. With everything else left as it was, equalizing citizenship rates would yield 314 rather than 208 Hispanic voters in the nation and 313 rather than 211 in the South. Equalizing registration rates would make the next largest impact, yielding 252 Hispanic voters in the U.S. (258 in the South). In the nation and in the South, equalizing turnout rates or matching age structures between Hispanic and non-Hispanics differed in terms of which had the larger impact. Matching the non-Hispanic share of voting-age proportion would produce 239 Hispanic voters (223 in the South). Identical voter turnout rates would make the smallest difference, yielding 223 Hispanic voters (242 in the South). (Of course, simultaneously equalizing citizenship, registration, the age distributions, and turnout would yield 472 Hispanic voters in the nation and 463 in the South.)

Figure 3 displays the turnout rates of the Hispanic citizen voting-age population in presidential elections in the U.S. from 1980 to 2008. Turnout fluctuates between 44.0 (1996) and 49.9 percent (2008). The Hispanic turnout rate rises during the last four presidential elections, from 1996 to 2008, from 44.0 to 49.9 percent. Interestingly, 2008 is the outlier in the series. If we fit a trend line through 1980-2004, the line would be essentially flat.

The Hispanic increase in turnout since 1996, noteworthy though it is, contrasts unfavorably with the much stronger turnout increases by blacks. Indeed, blacks have shown the greatest surge in turnout rates since 1996 (53.0 to 64.7 percent), almost doubling the percentage point increase for Hispanics (44.0 to 49.9). Figure 4 shows that Hispanic turnout continues to lag behind African-American and white turnout.

What might explain these lower registration and turnout rates among Hispanics compared to non-Hispanics? Hispanic group characteristics that are associated with lower turnout such

as relatively lower educational attainment, less income, shorter residency, and lingering language difficulties play a part. Yet even after controlling for such predictors of voting, Hispanic turnout levels still are below other demographic groups. As Rodolfo O. de la Garza noted after a broad-ranging analysis of the literature on why Hispanic mobilization lags: “The question, then, of why individual Latinos do not vote at the same rates as comparably situated Anglos remains unanswered.”²⁴

The Future

Prediction is a hazardous undertaking and well-reasoned ones can come to grief as circumstances and trends shift. Demographic trends such as birth rates and migration rates can vary, affecting the long-term growth of the Hispanic population. Naturalization rates for legal immigrants also fluctuate, affecting the citizenship component of the Hispanic population. Reports suggest an uptick in recent naturalization rates.²⁵ Registration drives, turnout drives, and enticing candidates can also make the Latino community more politically active.

Rather than attempt to predict future paths for these various components, this paper will close with a consideration of how and whether a Latino vote which favors Democrats over Republicans by roughly a two-to-one margin could, as the strong projected Latino population growth unfolds, turn a solidly red Republican state such as Texas into a competitive one.

The brief answer is that yes, it could, but under current rates of Hispanic mobilization and partisan preference, arithmetic suggests this would occur only in about 2040.

Competitive is defined as political parity where each party receives 50 percent of the vote. This exercise takes the voting-age population, citizenship, registration, and turnout rates for Hispanics that prevailed in the 2008 election and applies them to the projected growth of the Hispanic population over the next decades.

What share of Texas voters might be Hispanic in future elections? First we must consider the projections for the Hispanic population of Texas. Hispanics are projected to rise from 37.3 percent of the Texas population in 2010 to 52.6 percent by 2040. Projecting the relationship from 2008 between Hispanic voters and Hispanic population yields the line depicting percentage of the voters shown in Figure 5.²⁶

²⁴ Rodolfo O. de la Garza, “Latino Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2004, 7:91–123; quotation is at 101.

²⁵ Baker, Bryan C., 2009. “Trends in Naturalization Rates: 2008 Update,” Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_natztrends_fs_2008.pdf.

¹² “2008 Methodology for Texas Population Projections,” Population Estimates and Projections Program, Texas State Data Center, Office of the State Demographer, Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio, February 2009 (http://txsdc.utsa.edu/tpepp/2008projections/2008_txpopprj_txtotnum.php).

Partisan support rates are assumed to resemble those that have characterized some recent elections in Texas—Hispanics splitting their vote 70 percent for Democrats, 30 percent for Republicans; blacks split their vote 90 to 10 percent while all others (labeled “NH other” in Table 3) prefer Republicans by a 70 to 30 percent margin.²⁷

With those partisan support levels, if we assume blacks make up about 12 percent of the voters, simple arithmetic suggests Hispanics will have to total approximately 32 percent (and the remaining group, Non-Hispanic others, the remainder or 56 percent of the voters) in order to achieve partisan parity—a 50-50, Democratic-Republican vote split overall.

When might Hispanics total 32 percent of the voters? Taking the projected population increase for Hispanics in Texas and applying the voting-age population, citizenship, registration, and turnout rates for Hispanics that prevailed in the 2008 election, reveals that for Hispanics to make up 32 percent of the voters would require that Hispanics make up more than 50 percent of the population, a figure projected to occur in about 2030 according to selected population projections.²⁸

The point of these calculations is not to instill despair among those seeking to promote Hispanic political mobilization or complacency among those whose political standing might be lessened by greater Hispanic political clout. Rather, these calculations could foster a greater appreciation of the political reality likely to unfold from Hispanic population growth. To be sure, the assumptions underlying these calculations have considerable uncertainty. Immigration reform could affect these assumptions by providing a pathway to citizenship for those who were previously unauthorized. Higher naturalization rates, greater registration rates, higher turnout levels, and shifting political cohesion could also make such arithmetic projections off the mark. Over the long haul, birth rates, migration rates, and naturalization rates can change, with repercussions for the results sketched here. These numbers have fluctuated in the past and are likely to do so in the years ahead, making projections problematic. Political leadership will also shape the translation of Hispanic population into Hispanic voters and thus play a role in determining Hispanic political clout. A more precise conclusion proves elusive but in the nation as well as the South strong Latino population growth will yield growing Latino political clout.

¹³ One should note that partisan candidates in various election contests in Texas captured shares of the vote that differed from these, but these figures from exit polls in recent years are meant to convey a central tendency.

¹⁴ “2008 Methodology for Texas Population Projections.”

Figure 1: Hispanic Votes, Hispanic Population: The Gap

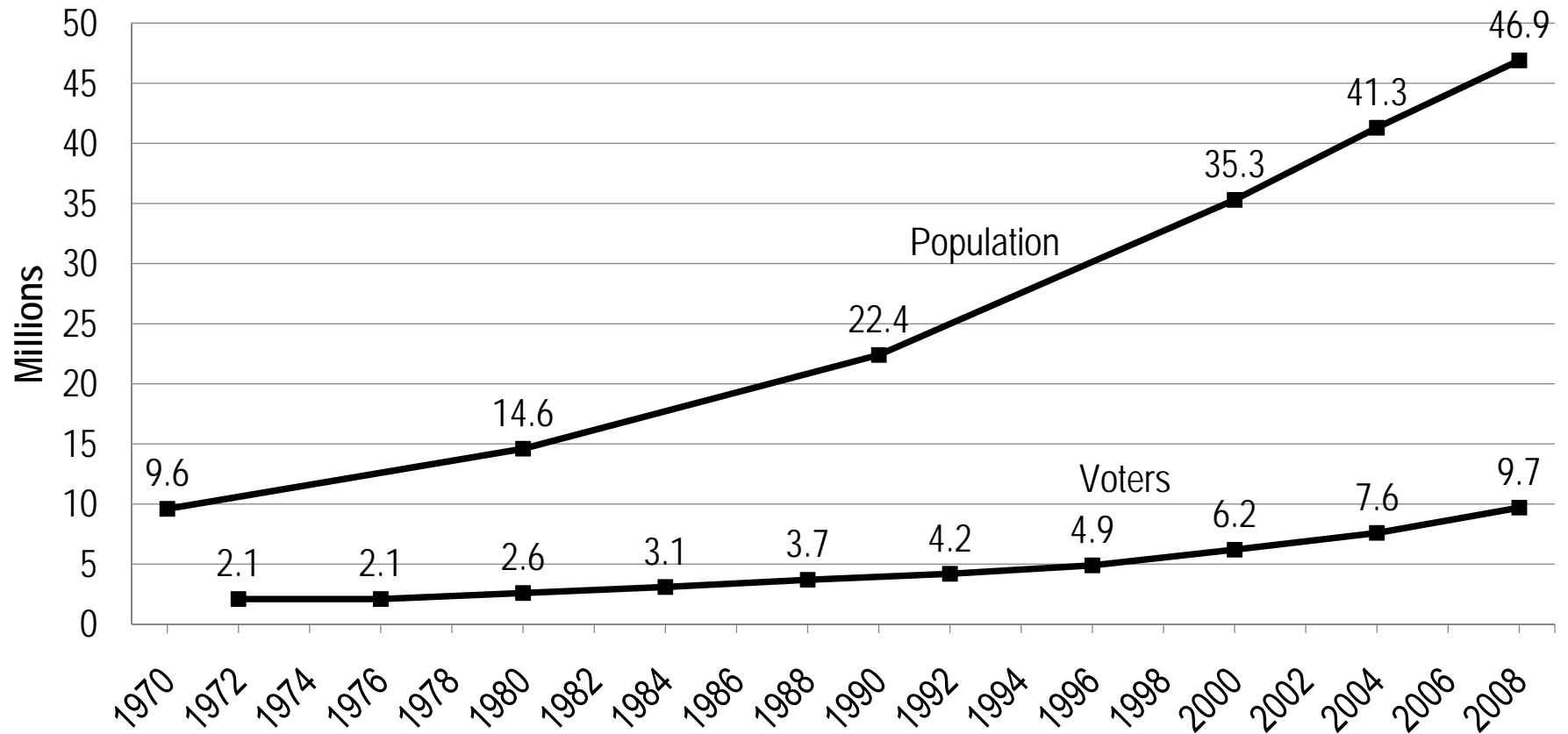


Figure 2: Hispanic Voters, Hispanic Population: The Gap in the South

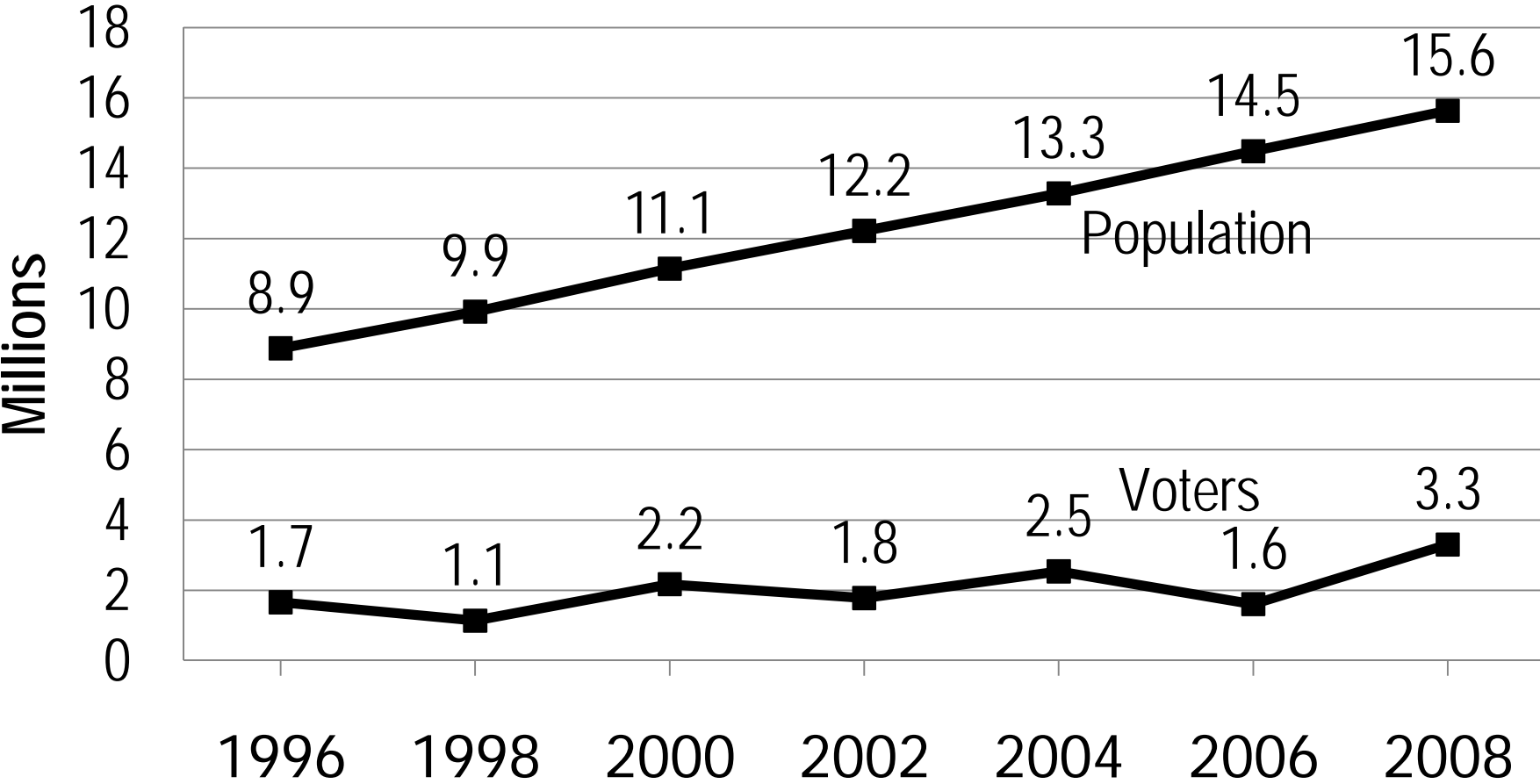


Figure 3: National Turnout of Hispanic Citizen Voting-age Population, Presidential Elections (%)

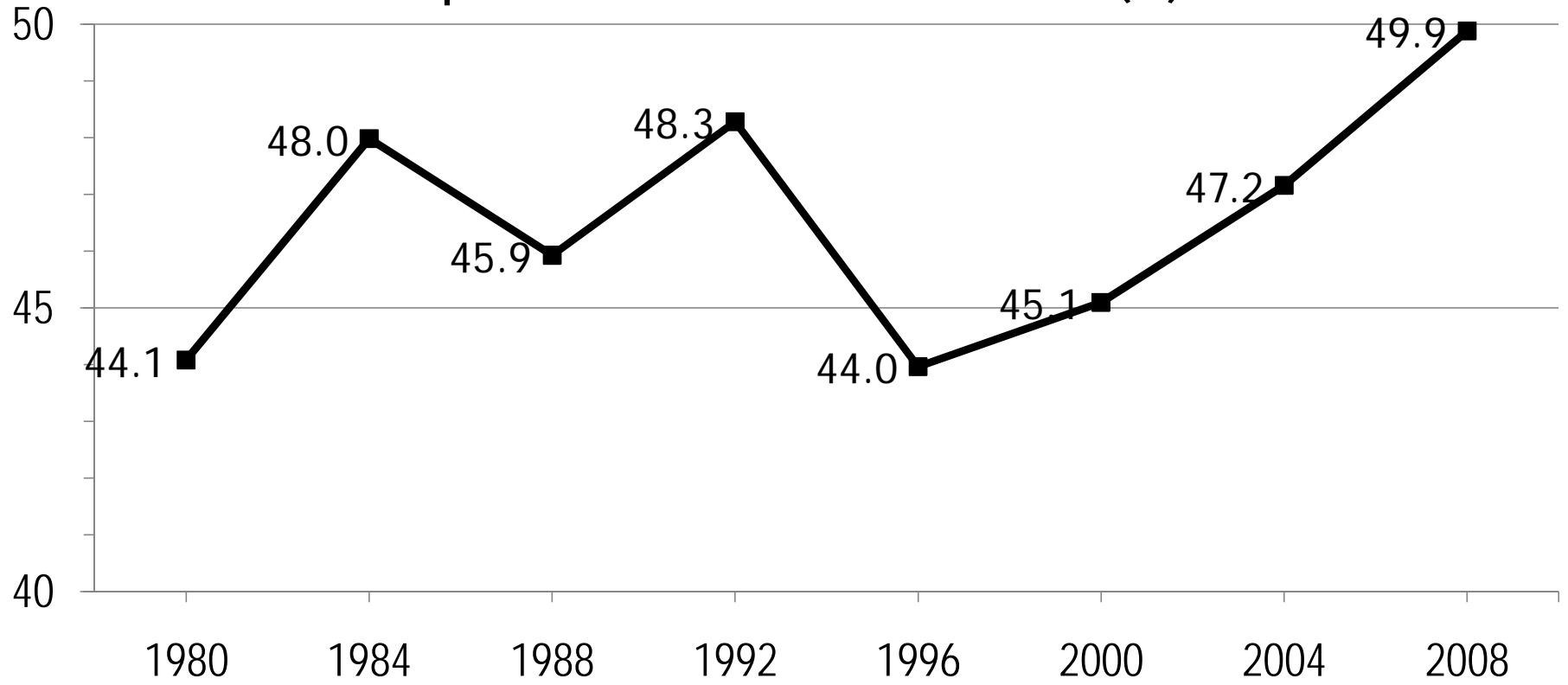


Figure 4: White, Black, and Hispanic Turnout of Citizen Voting-age Population in the U.S., 1980-2008

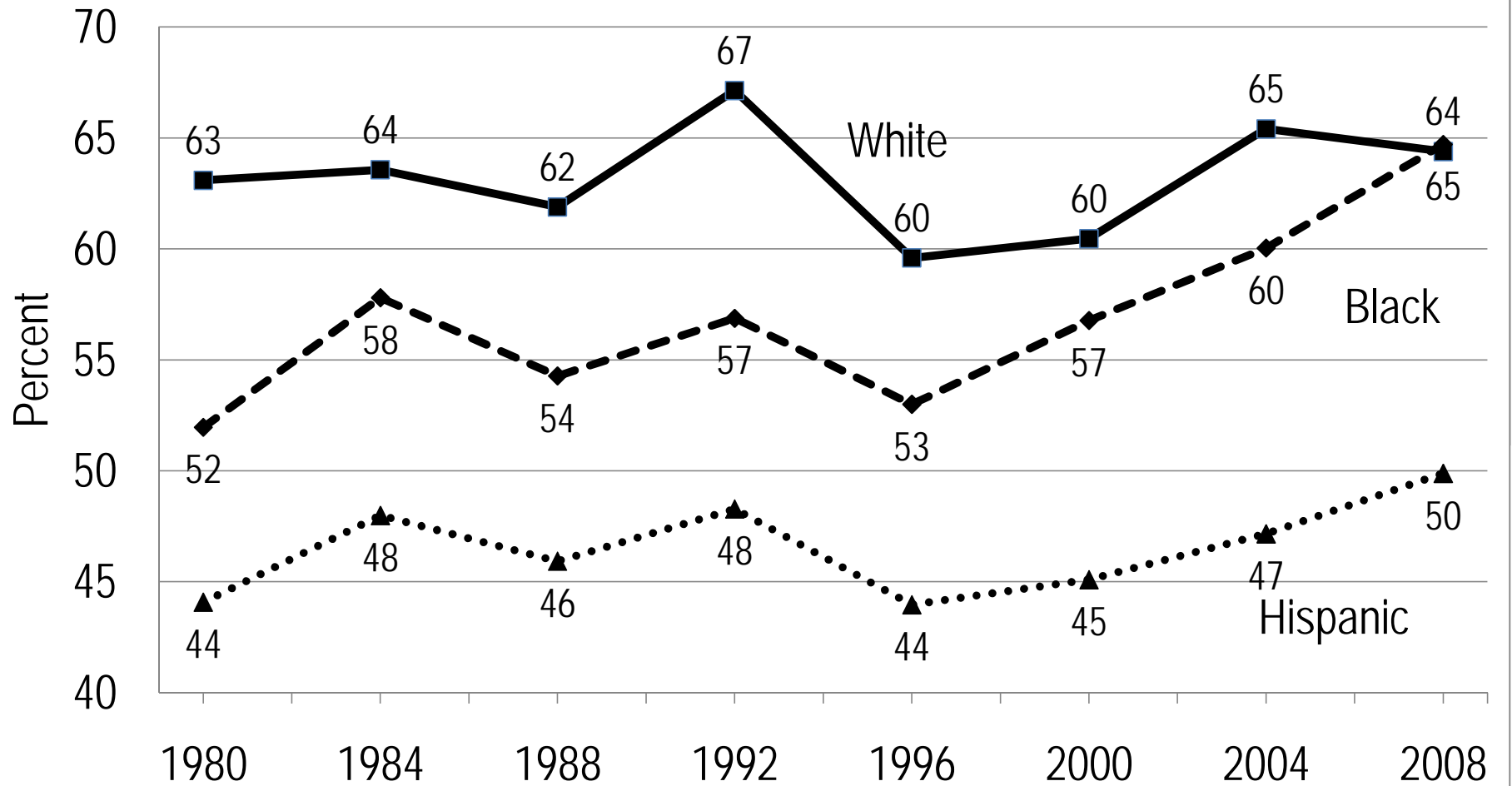


Figure 5: Hispanic Population and Voters, Texas, 2010-2040, percent

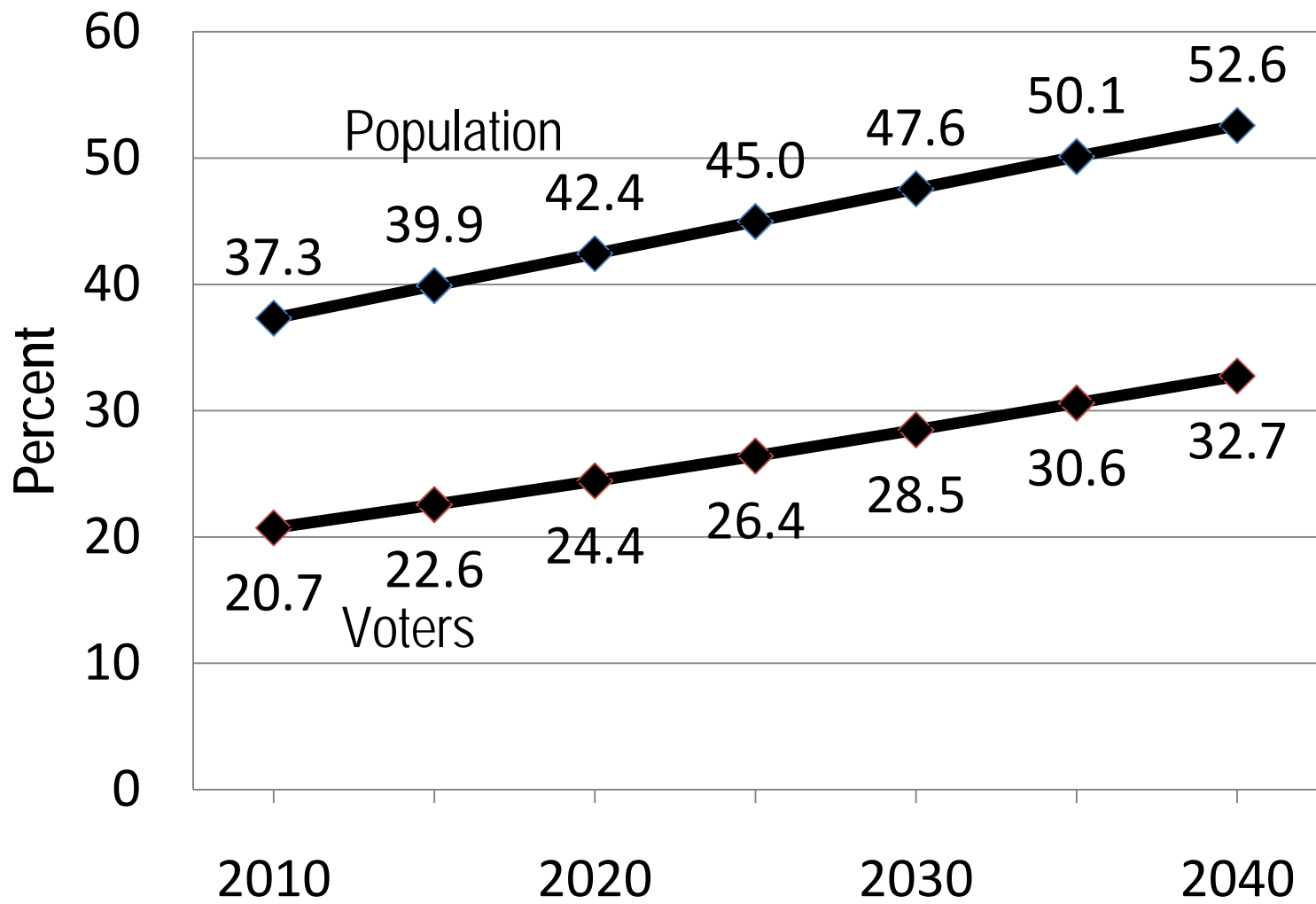


Table 1: Total Population, Voting-age Population, Citizen Voting-age Population, Registration, and Turnout, Hispanics and All Persons, United States and South, 2008

| | <i>Hispanic</i> | <i>Non-Hispanics</i> | <i>All persons</i> | <i>Percent Hispanic</i> |
|--|-----------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| United States | | | | |
| Total population | 46,943,613 | 257,116,111 | 304,059,724 | 15.4 |
| Voting-age population | 30,852,000 | 194,647,000 | 225,499,000 | 13.7 |
| Voting-age population percent of total population | 65.7 | 75.7 | 74.2 | -- |
| Citizen voting-age population | 19,537,000 | 186,535,000 | 206,072,000 | 9.5 |
| Citizen voting-age population percent of total voting-age population | 63.3 | 95.8 | 91.4 | -- |
| Registered | 11,608,000 | 134,703,000 | 146,311,000 | 7.9 |
| Registered, percent of citizen voting-age population | 59.4 | 72.2 | 71.0 | -- |
| Voted | 9,745,000 | 121,399,000 | 131,144,000 | 7.4 |
| Voted, percent of citizen voting-age population | 49.9 | 65.1 | 63.6 | -- |
| Voted, percent of registered | 84.0 | 90.1 | 89.6 | -- |
| South | | | | |
| Total population | 15,632,803 | 79,261,150 | 94,893,953 | 16.5 |
| Voting-age population | 10,983,000 | 58,844,000 | 69,827,000 | 15.7 |
| Voting-age population percent of total population | 70.3 | 74.2 | 73.6 | -- |
| Citizen voting-age population | 7,175,000 | 56,920,000 | 64,095,000 | 11.2 |
| Citizen voting-age population percent of total voting-age population | 65.3 | 96.7 | 91.8 | -- |
| Registered | 4,247,000 | 41,169,000 | 45,416,000 | 9.4 |
| Registered, percent of citizen voting-age population | 59.2 | 72.3 | 70.9 | -- |
| Voted | 3,304,000 | 36,707,000 | 40,011,000 | 8.3 |
| Voted, percent of citizen voting-age population | 46.0 | 64.5 | 62.4 | -- |
| Voted, percent of registered | 77.8 | 89.2 | 88.1 | -- |

Note : Hispanics may be of any race.

Sources : Total population: Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Table 4: Estimates of the Resident Population by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: July 1, 2008 (SC-EST2008-04), release date: May 14, 2009

<http://www.census.gov/popest/states/asrh/SC-EST2008-04.html>; voting-age population, citizen voting-age population, registration, and turnout: : U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Report, "Voter Turnout Increases by 5 Million in 2008 Presidential Election," July 20, 2009 <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/voting/013995.html>.

Table 2 Effect of voting-age, citizenship, registration, and turnout differentials among Hispanics and Non-Hispanics, United States and South, 2008

| | United States | | South | |
|--|------------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>Hispanics</i> | <i>Non-Hispanics</i> | <i>Hispanics</i> | <i>Non-Hispanics</i> |
| Total population | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| Voting-age proportion of total population | 0.6570 | 0.7570 | 0.7030 | 0.7420 |
| Voting-age population | 657 | 757 | 703 | 742 |
| Citizen proportion of voting-age population | 0.6330 | 0.9580 | 0.6530 | 0.9670 |
| Citizen voting-age population | 416 | 725 | 459 | 718 |
| Registration rate of citizen-voting age population | 0.5940 | 0.7220 | 0.5920 | 0.7230 |
| Registered | 247 | 524 | 272 | 519 |
| Turnout rate of registered | 0.8400 | 0.9010 | 0.7780 | 0.8920 |
| Voters | 208 | 472 | 211 | 463 |

Note: This example applies voting-age, citizenship, registration, and turnout rates from the 2008 election to determine the number of voters the initially equal population of 1,000 Hispanics and 1,000 non-Hispanics would produce.

Table 3: The Hispanic Vote Needed to Bring Texas to Political Parity

| | Vote choice (%) | | % of voters | % of all voters | |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|-----------------|------------|
| | Democratic | Republican | | Democratic | Republican |
| Hispanic | 70 | 30 | 32 | 22.4 | 9.6 |
| Black | 90 | 10 | 12 | 10.8 | 1.2 |
| Non-Hispanic others | 30 | 70 | 56 | 16.8 | 39.2 |
| outcome | | | | 50.0 | 50.0 |