

## CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

## The California Civic Engagement Project

*This brief highlights the dramatic increases and remaining disparities in Latino and Asian voter registration over the past decade in California.*

*The Good News: Even though their state registration rates are still lower, increases in Latino and Asian voter registration - nearly 40% for both groups - have occurred at a faster pace than those of the general population for every November election from 2002-2010.*

*Challenging News: There remains a significant gap between Latino and Asian registration compared to their proportion of the state's overall population. However, if patterns of increasing registration continue to hold then the Latino and Asian proportion of the state's registered voters should also continue to rise. The question remains how long will it take to close the current registration gap?*

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*The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a new nonpartisan data repository and research initiative for the state of California conducted by 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. The CCEP invites research and outreach partnerships from interested audiences.*

## CALIFORNIA LATINO AND ASIAN VOTER REGISTRATION RATES: A DECADE OF GROWTH AND DISPARITY

Over the last decade, dramatic shifts to California's demographic landscape have meant Latinos and Asians now comprise more than fifty percent of the state's population.

However, population gains do not automatically translate into an increase in political representation for these groups. How much of a democratic voice Latinos and Asians have in the strategic decisions for California depends, in part, on their ability to expand their engagement with the state's political structures. Voter registration is a key entry point to this engagement.

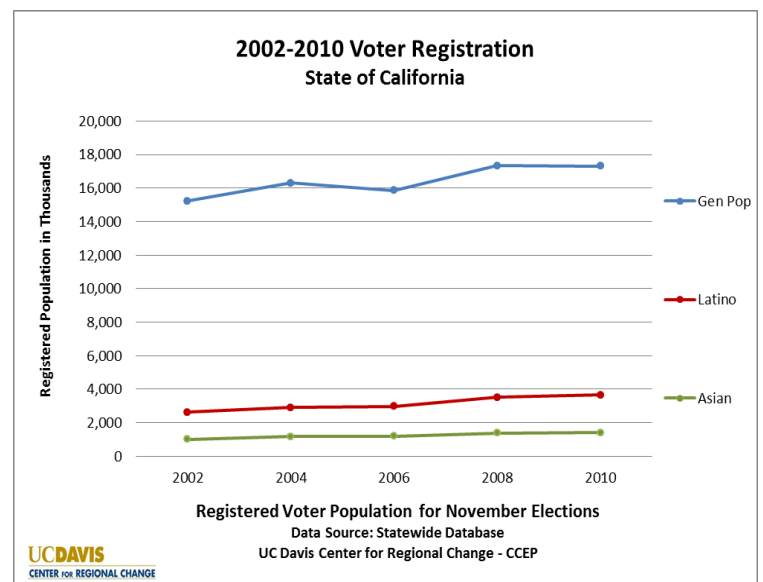
Consequently, a critical question is whether the voter registration of Latinos and Asians has managed to keep pace with the significant population increases of these groups over the past decade?

To address this query, the California Civic Engagement Project recently examined the state's voter registration rates for the 2002 through 2010 general elections. Utilizing actual voter registration records (surname counts), we track the growth of the state's Latino and Asian electorate, finding a mixed picture of registration for these groups.<sup>1</sup> **Both Latino and Asian registration numbers have dramatically outpaced those of the general population, yet there still remains a significant gap between Latino and Asian registration and their proportion of California's overall population.** If patterns over the last decade hold, then the Latino and Asian share of the state's electorate should increase in 2012, although not yet to a degree that represents their population share.

### State Voter Registration Rates Increased from 2002-2010

Historically, California registration rates for Latinos and Asians have run at levels far below those of the general population.<sup>2</sup> In the November 2010 election, this pattern held. For the state as a whole (and in nearly every county) Latino and Asian registration rates (percent registered of eligible citizens) are considerably lower than the general population's rate of 77.5% - Latinos at a rate of 67.9% (a total of 3,666,801 registered Latinos) and Asian registration at 49.4% (1,406,124 registered Asians). **Registering an estimated additional 520,000 Latinos and 800,000 Asians would be required** in order for these groups

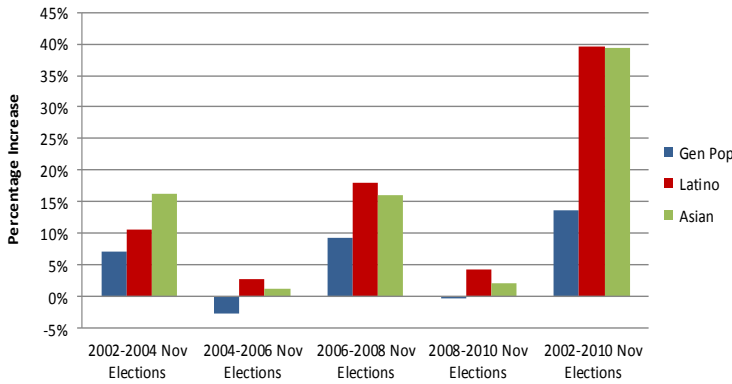
to achieve similar registration rates as the general population in 2010.<sup>3</sup>



For the general population, both their registration rates and total registered *increased* over the course of decade from the November 2002 election to the November 2010 election. In addition, the size of the Latino and Asian registered voter populations increased over the same time period, as well. Unlike the general population, Latino and Asian increases occurred for every general election over the decade, both midterm and presidential.

**Despite a decade of dramatic growth in California's Latino and Asian populations, there remains a significant gap in the inclusion of these populations within the state's voter registration system.**

**2002-2010 Voter Registration Change  
State of California**



Increase in Registered Voter Population Over Previous November Election

Data Source: Statewide Database

UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP



## LATINO AND ASIAN REGISTRATION OUTPACING THE GENERAL POPULATION

- Even though their state registration rates are still lower, increases in Latino and Asian voter registration are occurring at a *faster* pace than those of the general population.
- Indeed, Latino and Asian increases have *outpaced* the state's general population for every November election through the decade (2002-2010), with an increase of 39.6 percentage points for Latinos (an increase of 1,040,886 Latino registered voters) and 39.4% for Asians (397,309 more Asian registered voters).
- The general population's total registered increased only 13.7%. (an increase of 2,086,737 more general registered voters) - meaning the **state's registration gap (for total registered by group) is narrowing**.

## California's Registered Voters: Proportion Latino and Asian

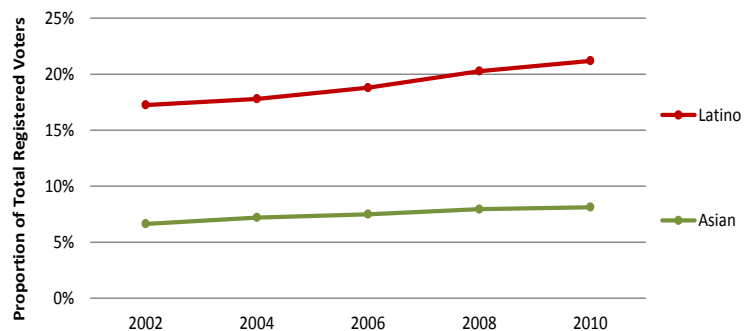
The Latino and Asian percent of the state's general registration has also been on the rise, increasing for every general election in the decade. For Latinos—an increase from 17.3% in 2002 to 21.2% in 2010. For Asians — an increase from 6.3% in 2002 to 8.1% in the 2010 general election.

However, the proportion of state registration that is Latino and Asian has remained far *below* the proportions of these groups in the state's overall population. In 2010, Latinos in the state made up 37.6% of the general population, with the Asian proportion at 13.1%.<sup>4</sup> In other words, there remain significant gaps between the state's population make-up and the racial and ethnic composition of its voter registration rolls. Further, the size of these gaps for the state, as a whole, has remained steady throughout the decade, despite gains in the Latino and Asian percent of general registration. For Latinos and Asians, these gaps lead to a lack of voting and political representation commensurate with their population share. Because both Latino and Asian populations include disproportionately larger numbers of non-citizens and children under 18, targeted long-term outreach efforts need to include these specific sub-groups in order to help increase the electoral representation of the Latino and Asian populations, as a whole, in the future.

For Latinos, the counties of the southern Central Valley have the largest gaps within the state (e.g. Fresno, 18.4%, Merced, 20.2%, Kern, 21.5%, and Madera, 25.6%). Many of the heavily populated and more urban counties also have high proportional registration gaps (e.g. LA, 17.8%, Riverside, 19.5%, and San Bernadino, 19.1%) and thus are driving up the average state gap of 16.4% for Latinos. Interestingly, we found very different patterns for Asians. For this group, the Bay Area (e.g. SF, 13.9%, San Mateo, 12%, and Alameda, 11.2%) and Sacramento area counties all have higher proportional gaps than the Asian state average of 4.9%.<sup>5</sup>

**Note:** We compare Latino and Asian registration to their proportions of the total state population (instead of only the citizen voting age population) in order to identify and highlight the level of representation these populations, as a whole, are experiencing in the state's electorate. Utilizing available ACS citizen voting age data, we were able to also compare 2010 Latino and Asian registration to their proportion of the state's citizen voting age population (CVAP). Even when utilizing this measure of population, there is still a demonstrated gap between the Latino and Asian proportion of general registration and their proportion of the state's population (excluding non-citizens and age ineligible). California's Latino registered % of CVAP was 24.2% in 2010. California's Asian registered % of CVAP was 12.8% in 2010.<sup>6</sup>

**2002-2010 Voter Registration:  
Proportion Latino and Asian  
State of California**



Latino and Asian Proportion of the General Registered Voter Population  
November Elections

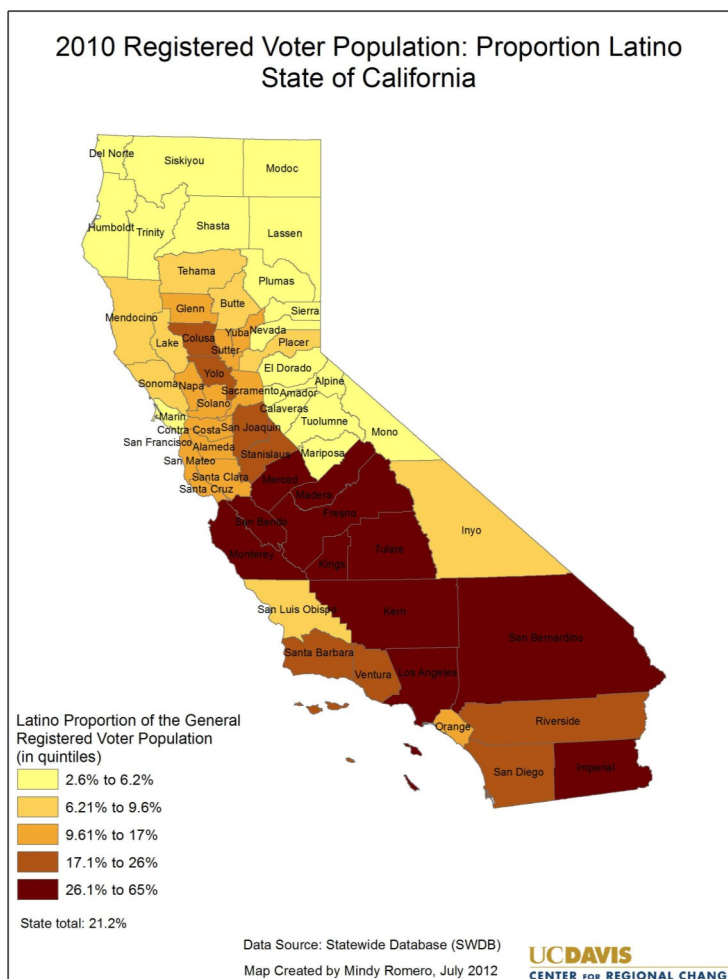
Data Source: Statewide Database

UC Davis Center for Regional Change - CCEP



## Implications for November 2012

- Current general registration rates in California are lower (72.3%, May 2012) than immediately before the November 2010 election. In 2008, registration rates rose 4.6 points between May and the November election day.<sup>7</sup> We do not yet know whether 2012 will follow a similar pattern. Will Latinos and Asians repeat their registration gains in the November Election? And what does this mean for their influence on the future of California?
- Recent national level analysis of Latino registration has indicated that its recent growth may have stopped or even been reversed, stunting projections for the Latino vote in November. The double challenge of increased mobility (due to the economic crisis) and new registration requirements in many states have increased the barriers to registration for both Latinos and Asians, nationally.<sup>8</sup>
- Despite these national concerns, **our analysis that California Latinos did continue to experience increased registration in 2010 provides reasons for optimism regarding their state performance this November.** Regardless of whether there are increases in voter registration rates themselves, if patterns over the last decade hold then Latinos and Asians should acquire an even larger proportion of the state's registered voters. And these proportions should continue to grow beyond 2012, particularly as the next generation of Latino and Asian youth come of age and further alter the state's voting eligible populations.
- However, the question remains to what extent will barriers (including those present within California's voter registration system itself) continue to yield a registered voting population that does not reflect the state, as a whole.<sup>9</sup> A decade of registration trends demonstrates that growth in registration is also disproportionate across counties and populations.
- In the absence of significant reductions to registration barriers, we expect that Latinos and Asians in the most heavily populated and urban counties will continue to hold a much larger influence over California's future than Latinos in the more rural and less densely populated areas of the state – but still not yet to a degree that is commensurate with their population share.
- Addressing these continuing gaps in Latino and Asian registration (particularly at a county and sub-county level) is a critical step in expanding engagement in California's political landscape.



*Want to access specific voter registration data by population and county?*

*Download our newly created California Voter Registration Tracking File at our website:*

<http://regional-change.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-voter-registration-tracking-file-2002-2010>

*The CCEP's Official Public Launch is*

*Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012  
9:00-10:30 AM*

*UC Sacramento Center  
1130 K Street, Suite LL  
Sacramento, CA 95814*

### UPCOMING BRIEF

*The Latino Promise vs. Reality: A Closer Look at the Latino Registration Gap in California*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Registration data was acquired from the Statewide Database and aggregated to the county and state level. These data are the actual registration 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. Latinos and Asians are distinguished in the registration data from the general population by the use of Spanish and Asian surname lists which identify registrants with commonly occurring Spanish and Asian surnames. The Passel-Word Spanish surname list, published by the US Census Bureau, was utilized to identify Latinos. For Asians, the US Census Bureau's surname lists for six major Asian American ethnic groups were utilized: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, and Vietnamese. Surname matching for Latinos is a commonly utilized methodology. However, confidence levels for Asian can be lower as it has generally been found to be more difficult to achieve accurate identification of Asian surnames. 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 and Asians 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%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See work such as: DeSipio, 1996, 2004, Hero and Campbell, 1996; Pew Hispanic Center, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Percent registered of the eligible population is measured using citizen voting age population data from the American Community Survey. These data are 5 year (2006-2010) estimates and are the only published source of current CVAP data at a county (and below) level. For more information on the limitations of the data, please see: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/resources/voter-registration-data>.

<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau: 2010 Decennial Census.

<sup>5</sup> San Diego is an exception to this urban population pattern for Latinos with a proportional population gap of only 14.3%. For detailed voter registration tables by California county, please see: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-voter-registration-tracking-file-2002-2010>.

<sup>6</sup> Percent registered of the eligible population is measured using citizen voting age population data from the American Community Survey. These data are 5 year (2006-2010) estimates and are the only published source of current CVAP data at a county (and below) level. For more information on the limitations of the data, please see: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/resources/voter-registration-data>.

<sup>7</sup> See: Report of Registration, May (2012) and May, October (2008), California Secretary of State. [http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections\\_u.htm](http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/elections_u.htm).

<sup>8</sup> See: [http://www.wcvi.org/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2012/120308\\_study.htm](http://www.wcvi.org/press_room/press_releases/2012/120308_study.htm).

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of barriers to voter registration that are present within California's voter registration system, see: "Future of California Elections", James Irvine Foundation (2012).

### **Author: Mindy Romero, UC Davis Center for Regional Change**

**The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a unique publically available comprehensive resource of civic engagement and election data in the state of California. A key focus of data analysis is identifying disparities in participation across place and population. The project also aims to support research that explores non-traditional measures of civic engagement, particularly those that may be more likely experienced by disadvantaged or disconnected groups. The CCEP's research is intended to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in the state of California and across its metropolitan and rural regions. The CCEP invites inquiries from interested researchers and other parties to access these data.**

*In addition to a series of policy briefs, CCEP data will be published in a range of other publications, beginning with Boom: A Journal of California, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall 2012).*

**For more information about the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, Project Director, at 530-665-3010 or [msromero@ucdavis.edu](mailto: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.*