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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Urban Institute
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New American

Co-ethnic Voting

Immigrant participation in the political arena has recently sparked intense scrutiny. The legal, political, and philosophical debates range from the propriety of financial contributions to both parties from non-U.S. citizens and foreign-business interests to allegations that the White House accelerated the naturalization of immigrants to swell the Democratic vote in the 1996 election. The splashy defeatâ\200\224 amid claims (since substantiated) of some voter fraud â\200\224 of veteran Congressman Robert Dornan by political neophyte Loretta Sanchez in a district increasingly composed of immigrants and U.S.-born co-ethnics, has served to highlight the political salience of the foreign-born.

New American and co-ethnic voting, furthermore, will likely become increasingly important, as the electoral consequences of increased immigration percolate through the nationâ\200\231s political system. Today, Hispanics are approximately 11 percent of the nationâ\200\231s population but account for only about 4.5 percent of its electorate.' Asians are about 3 percent of the population and 2 percent of the electorate. However, if one adopts the Census Bureauâ\200\231s current â\200\234middle-rangeâ\200\235 demographic and immigration assumptions, Hispanics will overtake African Americans as the largest minority group by the end of the first decade of the next century. By 2050, they will constitute over 20 percent of the population; at the same time, the proportion of the Asian population will have tripled to over 10 percent; and the white (Anglo) population will have decreased to about 54 percent of the nationâ\200\231s total [See Figure 1, on pg. 3].²

In addition to their fast growth rate, immigrants are geographically concentrated, with the majority of naturalized citizens residing in five statesâ\200\224 California, Texas, New York, Illinois, and Floridaâ\200\224that hold 166 of the countryâ\200\231s 538 electoral votes (or 61 percent of the 270 votes needed to win). Perhaps even more important, significant and growing Latino populations in

New Jersey and in small Southwestern states such as Arizona and Colorado make them increasingly likely to play swing roles in competitive elections.

How much is known about these potential voters? What traits or experiences shape their decisions to naturalize, register, and vote? What are their likely party allegiances, policy preferences and political values, and how do these vary by national origin, age, education, and other socio-economic variables? Are there distinctive Latino or Asian political communities, and if so, along what lines are they constituted: national origin, location, common ideological or economic concerns, ethnicity? Finally, do the results of the 1996 election represent, as some political analysts have suggested, the permanent â\200\234politicizationâ\200\235 of immigrant and co-ethnic communities?

Answers to these questions are important for many reasons. To traditional political parties, they are important because the changing composition of the electorate often heralds political realignments: the 1996 returns, which went heavily democratic, lend additional urgency to this issue. To ethnic political leaders, they matter because of the need to mobilize their base. Above all, the questions matter because how immigrants and their co-ethnics become incorporated in the polity is likely to exert an increasingly large influence on the country's future electoral contests.

This article focuses on the political attitudes and behavior of the larger ethnic communities that incorporate immigrants, and not

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Executive Summary

4+ Hispanics and Asians, both immigrant-influenced populations, constitute roughly 4.5 and 2 percent of the nation's voters, respectively. However, their geographical concentration and demographic growth suggest that they will become increasingly important elements of the nation's electorate.

The primary reason for low rates of voting among Hispanics and Asians is their low rate of citizenship.

1) Recency of arrival, low education and socio-economic levels and a youthful population discourage both naturalization and voter turnout among most Latino groups.

2) Cubans, however, manifest high levels of naturalization and voting irrespective of their income or education, and exhibit high levels of political engagement.

3) Although Asian immigrants tend to naturalize at relatively high rates, a tendency to be less familiar with democratic processes discourages them from registering. Those who do register, however, then turn out to vote at high rates.

Immigrant and co-ethnic voters primarily define themselves by their national origin, rather than in pan-ethnic terms such as Latino or Asian.

The policy preferences of these communities do not fall neatly within the parameters of either party. While voting by most ethnic communities has traditionally followed predictable party lines, it is problematic to say that any of these national-origin groups is naturally Democratic or Republican.

4+ Until 1996, Latino communities generally voted along

predictable lines: a declining majority of Mexican Americans voted for Democrats, and (except on a couple of occasions) a strong majority of Cubans voted for Republicans. Data from 1992 suggest that Asians voted by a slight majority for President Bush.

In 1996, President Clinton won 71 percent of the Latino vote, a 16 point jump from his 1992 performance. He also won a majority of the Asian American vote, and nearly doubled his showing among Cuban Americans. Among newly naturalized citizens, he did even better, capturing over 80 percent of the vote of most groups.

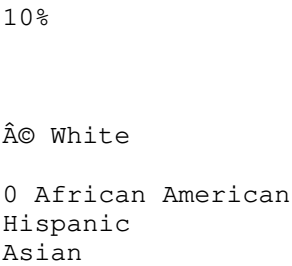
There has not been any study conclusively explaining Clinton's 1996 showing among immigrants and co-ethnics. Most analysts assume, however, that several Republican initiatives, including the new immigration and welfare laws, may have generated a feeling of vulnerability among these groups that led them to mobilize and vote for Democrats.

At the Presidential level, the actual impact of new American and co-ethnic voters remains slight: only Arizona went to Clinton as a result of their 1996 votes. At the Congressional and state level, however, these votes are becoming increasingly important.

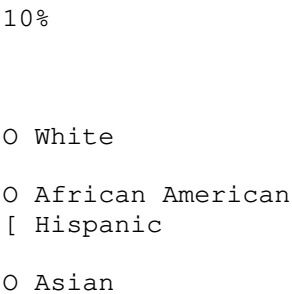
How new American and co-ethnic voters become incorporated into the political life of the nation will have dramatic consequences for the system of partisan coalition- building that is U.S. politics.

Figure 1: Source: Census Bureau Projections

U.S. Population, by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1995



U.S. Population, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Projected 2050



(continued from page 1)

simply on naturalized immigrants alone. The reason for this is two-fold. First, limiting the focus to naturalized U.S. citizens would result in partial and inadequate intelligence: there are few data that differentiate the political behavior of foreign-born naturalized Americans from their U.S.-born co-ethnics. Second, the political interests of the naturalized immigrant and the corresponding native-born ethnic populations are typically overlapping. Indeed, the latter could quite accurately be characterized as â\200\234immigrant-influenced populations,â\200\235 as political scientist Louis DeSipio points out. The young Asian or Hispanic who was born and grew up in the United States is quite likely to have both a naturalized U.S. citizen parent and an uncle or aunt living down the hall who arrived just last year. Many of the policy concerns of the U.S.-born co-ethnics are thus to a large degree shaped by their concern for the immigrants who are joining them. Conversely, the established ethnic community is, for most immigrants, the channel of incorporation into U.S. social and political life. For the sake of simplicity, this larger group of naturalized and native-born ethnics will be referred to in this article as new Americans and co-ethnic voters.

Who Votes?

Compared to the African American and white, non-Hispanic populations, the proportion of Latinos and Asians who vote is quite small. The primary reason for this is of course that fewer of them are U.S. citizens. High rates of immigration in recent years mean that substantial numbers have not yet met the residency requirement. In addition, some national groups have also exhibited low levels of naturalization even when they are qualified. Among white non-voters in 1992, for example, 14.4 percent were non-citizens; among blacks, the figure was 10.8 percent; among Latinos and Asians, however, those figures rose to 56.6 and 62.2 percent, respectively.

Yet while citizenship is a necessary requirement for voting (but see Sidebar 2), it does not guarantee that a person will vote. For white non-Hispanics the single most important predictor of voting is education level. Age, income, and social status also affect votingâ\200\224although when the education variable is taken out of the mix, they tend to be relatively modest in their effects.

The situation is more complicated for new Americans and their co-ethnics. Mediated by complex processes of acculturation and integration into the ethnic community and mainstream society, the voting behavior of these groups is influenced by a host of variables. Furthermore, depending on the new American and co-ethnic group in question, these variables have different impacts at each point along the line of discrete decisions that lead from naturalization to voter registration to actual voting [See Figure 2].

Comparative Rates of Naturalization, Registration, and Turnout,
by Ethnicity and Race 1994

100

90

80

70

60

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White African Hispanic Asian
American
[Turn out
[Register
[Naturalized or U.S. born

Figure 2: Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Immigrant and ethnic communities
are emerging electorates of increasing
demographic importance.

Latino Voters

Many immigrants of Mexican extraction are such recent arrivals that they have not yet met the residency requirement for naturalization, and many of those who do exhibit low rates of naturalization. Beyond these limitations, the major explanation for the low rates of Mexican American political participation and thus a primary cause of the gap between the size of their population and their political strength has traditionally been a socio-demographic profile that is associated with low turnout rates. Researchers have known since 1980 that Mexican Americans vote at rates similar to the rest of the population once age, education, and income are controlled for. But because Mexican Americans are disproportionately young, poorly educated, and of relatively low income, they vote at correspondingly low rates.

Furthermore, researchers have found that for Mexican immigrants, naturalization, like voter turnout, is a function of age, education, income and English language ability. This suggests

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From The World, 1917. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

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that the socio-demographic profile of Mexican immigrants depresses their participation in two ways: first, by lowering naturalization rates, and second, by lowering turnout rates even among those who have become citizens.

A very different scenario obtains for pre-Mariel Cubans.â\200\231 They naturalized at very high rates, and once naturalized, registered and voted at rates higher than the white population. This would not seem surprising, perhaps, given that this group is well-educated and middle or upper classâ\200\224except that among this group voter turnout does not vary much by income or education.

Do the 1996 elections represent the permanent â\200\234politicizationâ\200\235 of immigrant and ethnic communities?

In order to explain findings such as these and better understand the processes of political incorporation that operate in Latino communities, Rodolfo de la Garza and his associates undertook a major ethnographic study of five Hispanic neighborhoods in U.S. cities in the months prior to the 1990 election. It found that in the Houston and New York barrios, political participation was extremely low.* The communities were politically uninterested, apathetic, even cynical. The situation was

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only marginally better in two of the studyâ\200\231s other sites: Los Angeles and Chicago. In these cities, a core group of politically active Latinos organized themselves to mobilize political strength within the barrio and catch the attention of the cityâ\200\231s political leaders to help meet the barrioâ\200\231s specific needs. Still, their efforts were largely unsuccessful. These findings led de la Garzaâ\200\231s group to suggest that Latino immigrants were being assimilated into â\200\234political non-participation,â\200\235 and hypothesize that such non-participation stemmed in part from earlier discrimination that had discouraged Latinos from participating in the political process. They also encountered impressionistic evidence that low levels of education, income, and English language ability all contributed to an atmosphere that was described as â\200\234politically inactive.â\200\235â\200\235

The Socio-demographic profile of Mexican immigrants depresses their level of political participation.

In the fifth research site, however, the Cuban enclave of Miami,

an entirely different atmosphere prevailed. There, Cubanismo â\200\224 the meaning of being Cuban and the authenticity of competing interpretations of Cubannessâ\200\224 defined the political debate. Politics permeated the public arena: talk shows, advertisements and campaign posters were ubiquitous. Candidates at every level, including the governor, repeatedly visited the neighborhood.

Much of the political drive of Cuban Americans originates from their status as political refugees and is fueled by an intense desire to organize as an effective force for getting rid of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro. At the national level, the power of the Cuban American National Foundation and its president, Jorge Mas Canosa, is obvious in their extraordinary influence over U.S. policy towards Cuba. But even in the local races, the rhetoric of exile and cultural authenticity went hand-in-hand with an agenda for engagement in domestic politics. The energy Cuban Americans bring to the political processâ\200\224in terms of organizing and lobbying as well as votingâ\200\224suggests that political commitment is not simply a function of socioeconomic attributes but is in certain instances an independent variable.

Asian Voters

If information on Latino voting is sketchy, that on Asian Americans is at an embryonic stage. The voting rate of U.S.-born and naturalized citizens of Asian ancestry falls somewhere between the figures for Hispanics and white Anglos. This â\200\234average,â\200\235 however, conceals some interesting variations. Asian immigrants naturalize at high rates; those who naturalize reg-

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ister at unusually low rates; however, those who register then vote at high rates. Researchers Paul Ong and Don Nakanishi suggest that Asian immigrants undergo a â\200\234prolonged and multifaceted process of social adaptation and learning before fully participating in their newly adopted country.â\200\235 Coming from countries where meaningful democratic participation is problematic, at best, their political education is complex, lengthy, and still poorly understood, say Ong and Nakanishi.Â®

Voting Patterns Democrat Republican Other

Mexican Americans

1960 85 i[5 na

1964 90 10 na

1968 87 10 3

189722 64-85 15-36 na

1976 92 "8 na

Latinos .

1976 S o na

1980 56 S 7

1984 : 5 56-68 32-44 na

19885 62-70 30-38 na

11992 - 51-62 - 24-31 14-16

1996 71-75 18 7

Asians :

1992 (NY State Ohly) 41 5 na

1996 (Nation wide)* 53 40 6

(NYSSState only)i = s 7 21 8

(LA & Orange Co.) 61 By 6

(SF Bay Area) 83 9 8

Sources: Latinos: Counting on the Latino Vote, DeSipio, 1996.

Asians: National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, 1997.

* Limited sample size and inadequate methodology may have compromised these results.

Figure 3

Voting Blocs & Concerns

While Hispanic is a recognized demographic category, the majority of the people whom the Census Bureau so describes donâ\200\231t think of themselves in such pan-ethnic terms. Nor, according to Rodolfo de la Garza and Louis DeSipio, do they exhibit much of the solidarity that labels like Hispanic or Latino seem to imply. Unlike, say, American blacks or Jews who, as a result of external discrimination or internal cohesiveness, constitute themselves in communities that become the basis for voting blocks, few Americans of Latin American and Caribbean origin identify themselves primarily as Latinos or Hispanics. Instead,

their preferred form of self-identification and their feelings of solidarity extend to those of their own national-origin. For example, one national survey of Latinos found that 62 percent of U.S.-born Mexican Americans preferred a Mexican-origin ethnic identification, 28 percent preferred a pan-ethnic identification, and 10 percent preferred simply to be called â\200\234American.â\200\235 Among

Mexican-born immigrants, those figures were 85 percent, 14 percent, and 0.3 percent, respectively. Similar figures obtained for other Latino groupsâ\200\224with one notable exception: the percentage of U.S.-born Cubans who preferred the label of â\200\234Americanâ\200\235 was 39 percent.â\200\235

New American and co-ethnic voters share many of the same concerns as the broader electorate. A 1996 exit poll of Asian Americans in New York City, for example, found that 29 percent said the state of the economy was their primary concern, followed by 17 percent who cited the candidatesâ\200\231 character, and 14 percent who cited immigration. Using different polling methods a survey of Los Angeles Asians found that 60 percent cited education as among the most important issues, followed by 56 percent who chose the economy, and 43 percent who chose crime (respondents were allowed to select more than one issue â\200\224 unfortunately, immigration was not a possibility). A comprehensive 1990 survey of Latino political attitudesâ\200\224 the most recent one availableâ\200\224 showed that social problems such as crime and drugs dominated their list of the most important national and local concerns, with economics, health care and education trailing well behind.

Few immigrants think of themselves in pan-ethnic terms.

Voting Preferences

Mexican Americans and most other Latinos have traditionally voted Democratic in proportions ranging from 55 to 75 percent. Cubans have typically voted Republican at rates of 80 percent or more [See Figure 3]. Historical patterns do not necessarily imply entrenched attitudes: are these voting patterns firmly established?

The Cuban perception that Republicans were tougher on communism and, by extension, on Castro, coupled with bitterness at John Kennedyâ\200\231s refusal to send the marines to help Cuban counter-revolutionaries at the Bay of Pigs, is thought to explain the early Cuban allegiance to the Republican party. However, the results of the 1992 election, in which Clinton made an aggressive effort to woo Cuban American voters, suggest that even the most partisan and politically engaged of the new ethnic communities is amenable to overtures from the other party.

In April 1992, then-Governor Clinton endorsed the Torricelli bill (aimed at further tightening the trade embargo against Cuba) before Bush did, and won qualified supportâ\200\224if not an actual endorsementâ\200\224from Jorge Mas Canosa, arguably the most influential political leader in the Cuban American community. While Clinton eventually won only 22 percent of the Cuban American vote to Bushâ\200\231s 70 percent, he was able to raise \$275,000 in contributions from this community at a critical moment in his campaign. Furthermore, Clintonâ\200\231s 22 percent was a large increase over the 12 and 15 percent that Mondale and Dukakis had won in 1984 and 1988, respectively, and his aggressive outreach efforts forced Bush to devote considerable campaign energiesâ\200\224and fundsâ\200\224to securing his base. Furthermore, in 1992 Cubans also overwhelmingly supported Democrat Bob Gramm over a Republican who had little chance of winning. And, as will be shown below, Cuban American support for Clinton grew substantially in 1996.

The margin for â\200\234conversionâ\200\235 or cross-over voting is considerable.

Like Cuban American support for Republicans, Mexican American support for Democrats is based on a combination of historical, ideological, and socio-economic factors: John Kennedyâ\200\231s outreach efforts in the 1960 election, via autonomous political clubs called Viva Kennedy!; Democratâ\200\231s greater support for the sort of government services that are important to Mexican Americans; and the perception that the Democrats are more â\200\234on the side ofâ\200\235 the historically poor or disenfranchised. Nevertheless, the data suggest a steady, slow drift from the Democratic to the Republican party over time. From 1960 to 1976, Latino (then Mexican American) support for Democrat Presidential candidates averaged 86 percent; from 1980 to 1992, that figure dropped to 60 percent, hitting a low of 57 percent in 1988 andâ\200\224according to at least one pollâ\200\22451 percent in 1992. While a part of the difference here is compositional,

Figure 4

Cara Metz, UNITE

Registering Voters, 1996

reflecting the influx, growth and high levels of voting of the Cuban population, a general movement towards the Republican party among non-Cuban Hispanics appears to have taken place as well. This is largely due to greater Latino representation in the upper half of the socioeconomic continuum. (There are no good national data on voting behavior over time for the various populations that comprise the Hispanic community.)

In short, while Latino communities have traditionally followed predictable party lines, the margin for â\200\234conversionâ\200\235 or cross-over voting appears to be considerable. When it comes to party identification, for example, Mexican American support for Democrats is widespread but not particularly ferventâ\200\224more prefer to call themselves â\200\234Democraticâ\200\235 than â\200\234strongly Democratic.â\200\235 Nearly half of Cubans identify themselves as strongly Republican, but 25 percent identify themselves as Democratic, albeit many of them only â\200\234weaklyâ\200\235 [See Figure 4]. This susceptibility for â\200\234conversionâ\200\235 can also be seen in the large percentages of not-yet naturalized Latinos who express

(continued on page 9)

Partisan Sentiments

Ethnic Group	Strong Democrat	Independent	Republican	Strong Republican
Mexican	31%	35.8%	1B1R5Y/6	75156 4.4%
Cuban	14.4%	11 :1%	5.7	21% 47.8%
Chinese	2.3%	26.9%	27.7%	270 9ROY6
Filipino	8.3%	35.8%	20859	28806 8.3%
Vietnamese	1.8%	B5 550	19.1%	24.5% 119556

Sources: Latinos: Latino National Political Survey, 1988 data, in Latino Voices.
Asians: Republican National Committee, 1992 unpublished data, in Statistical Record of Asian Americans.

(continued from page 7)

either no party preference or who identify themselves as independent: depending on national origin, the figure ranges from 60 to 80 percent.

In 1996, the number of Asians and Latinos who naturalized, registered, and voted were up dramatically.

This partisan ambivalence is further reflected in polls on political attitudes and policy issues, which suggest that both parties have potential appeal. Indeed, from the perspective of traditional U.S. political parties, Latino political attitudes can best be described as a patchwork of paradoxes. According to the 1990 Latino National Political Survey, most Latinos identify themselves as moderate to conservative ideologically; yet firm majorities in every national origin group support increased government spending to alleviate perceived social ills and to provide Great Society services. The majority of Mexican Americans are firmly opposed to abortion; Cubans are generally pro-choice. In short, it is difficult to make any firm generalizations about Latino partisanship based on their policy preferences. Even if one acknowledges that a certain amount of self-interest governs statements from Latino leaders about their community being â\200\234up for grabs,â\200\235 it seems clear neither party has an ideological lock on this growing body of voters.

Indeed, it is possible that quite the reverse might happen, and that Latino voters will reshape state parties over time. As their numbers grow (and the number of non-Latino Democrats declines), they will become a significant part of the Texas, New Mexico, and California Democratic parties, and will affect that partyâ\200\231s positions on all issues of relevance to them.

The political attitudes of Asian immigrants and co-ethnics have not been studied as closely, yet their recent voting behavior suggests that they, too, may be â\200\234up for grabs.â\200\235 As with Hispanics, national origin plays a strong predictive role in voter preferences, with Filipinos voting Democratic and Vietnamese voting Republican [See Figure 4]. It would appear from local exit polls that a slight majority of Asian Americans voted Republican in the 1992 election, but a large majority voted Democratic in 1996.7In a 1992 survey, a slight plurality of most Asian American national origin groups identified themselves as Democrat; however, more identified themselves as â\200\234strongly Republicanâ\200\235 than â\200\234strongly Democratic.â\200\235 Finally, a substantial proportion of several groups did not identify with either party.

The 1996 Returns

In 1996, the number of Latinos and Asians who naturalized, registered, and voted were all dramatically up: according to the Southwest Voter Research Institute, the Latino electorate grew by 28.7 percent from 1992 to 1996. Furthermore, Latinos voted overwhelmingly Democratic. Clinton won 71 percent of the Hispanic voteâ\200\22410 to 16 percentage points more (depending on the poll) than he had won in 1992. He made significant inroads on the Republicanâ\200\231s lock on the Cuban vote, and, also in contrast to 1992, won a substantial majority of the Asian vote. Clintonâ\200\231s edge was even larger among newly naturalized citizens than among comparable U.S.-born ethnics. In California, for example, 71 percent of Latinos voted for Clinton, but 85 percent of Latinos who had naturalized since 1992 voted for him. Similar figures obtained for Asian Americans in New York City, where 75 percent voted for Clinton, including 84

percent of first-time voters (the best proxy for recently naturalized immigrants).

It seems that immigrant and ethnic communities were responding to a feeling of vulnerability and exposure.

Naturalization rates prior to the election skyrocketed as the result of a conjunction of forces, from 446,000 in fiscal year 1995 to 1.05 million in 1996 (by contrast, the previous record was 442,000 in 1944!) Among the factors that are thought to have played a role in this increase, the most important demographically may be that the 1986 cohort of legalized aliens were becoming eligible to naturalize and thus sponsor their immediate family members. Common sense and some statistical evidence suggests that California's Propositions 187 and 209 (which would have prevented illegal aliens from receiving public education and non-emergency health services, and largely eliminated affirmative action), as well as new draconian welfare legislations that removed the social safety net from under legal immigrants, and a sharply illiberal immigration law prompted immigrants to naturalize and mobilized them and their co-ethnic communities to vote. The bureaucratic requirement in effect for the last couple of years that lawful permanent residents replace their green cards may also have prompted many to go ahead and naturalize (it required little more administrative effort or cost to naturalize than it did to secure a new green card).

In California, a 1996 NALEO survey of recently naturalized Latinos found that 96 percent cited the right to vote as important in their decision to become a citizen, 88 percent cited

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Cara Metz, UN

? Registering Voters, 1996

better opportunities for their children's future, 88 percent cited better protection under the law (suggesting that many felt threatened by the recent political climate), and 84 percent said that naturalizing would "help me fight discrimination against immigrants." The survey found that 83 percent of the recently naturalized had registered to vote, compared to only 56 percent of U.S. citizen Latinos and 73 percent of all U.S. citizens.

There have not been, to our knowledge, any surveys conclusively linking the political mobilization and partisanship of new American and co-ethnic voters in 1996 to a single cause. Most analysts assume that Republican opposition to immigration cost them these communities' votes an intuitively plausible hypothesis until one recalls that most Latinos also favor reducing immigration. It seems more likely that these communities were responding to a more generalized feeling of vulnerability and exposure. This has been a long-standing pattern. As a result of pressures emanating from the mainstream, immigrants have often developed a political consciousness and an ethnic solidarity that they lacked before. While one must not lose sight of the fact that during the immigration wars of the last couple of years few leading Democrats found the courage to stand up for immigrants, the evidence suggests it was certain Republican-led initiatives that had the most impact in 1996. Whether unintentionally or by design, Propositions 187 and 209, as well as a Republican campaign against illegal immigration that to many Hispanics seemed to implicate

all of them, created an atmosphere that they found threatening. It is reasonable to expect that the Latino and, to a lesser extent, the Asian communities were mobilized to protest these measures and protect themselves from some of their effects. (Citizenship would "immunize" them from the effects of welfare reform.) And although both the welfare and the immigration bills would be signed by a Democratic president, they were seen as Republican initiatives.

There is, incidentally, already some very preliminary evidence that whatever "damage" the 1996 Presidential election did to Republican chances among new American and co-ethnic voters may not be permanent. Perhaps the most notable case in point is the overwhelming support enjoyed by Republican Richard

Riordan in Los Angelesâ\200\231 recent mayoral race, albeit in a largely non-partisan contest. Also notable is the election of conservative Republican Bill Redmond to the U.S. House of Representatives from a predominantly Democratic northern New Mexico district, and the re-election of Mayor Bret Schundler in the ethnically diverse city of Jersey, N.J. In both cases, a platform of cultural conservatism and centrist, good governance pledges persuaded large numbers of new Americans and co-ethnic voters to side with Republicans.

At the state and local level, immigrant and ethnic communities will play an increasingly important role.

The Electoral Impact

One effect of the growing number of immigrants and co-ethnics has been an increase in the number of ethnic political representatives [See Figure 5]. From 1984 to 1994, for example, the number of Hispanic representatives in Congress increased from 9 to 17; the number in state houses, from 124 to 184. There are a variety of explanations for this increase. Because for re-districting purposes the Census Bureau counts people, not voters, the growth in the number of immigrants (whether naturalized or not) itself plays a role in creating districts in which ethnics predominate. Furthermore, perhaps one of the few generalities that can be made of both Asians and Hispanics, naturalized and native-born, is that given the choice, most members of immigrant and ethnic communities will vote for a fellow co-ethnic. Steven Chen, for example, a conservative Republican candidate for the New York State Assembly in 1996, won 71 percent of the Asian American vote in his district even though 51 percent of those polled were registered Democrat compared to only 19 percent Republican. Chen lost the election 72 to 28 percent. (On the other hand, Washingtonâ\200\231s Gary Locke became the nationâ\200\231s first Asian American governor on the mainland

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â\200\224

Hispanic

U.S. Representatives 9 10

State 124 122

Municipal 1015 1048

Asian

State Legislators na na

Hispanic Elected Officials by Level of Government, 1984-94

Asian Elected Officials in State Legislatures, 1992-94

11 10 il 17 19

1124 134 139 184 na

1106 1290 1362 1647 na

na na 54 53} na

Sources: NALEO, 71994 National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials, National Conference of
State Legislatures, 1995

Figure 5

by appealing across racial and ethnic lines: he would have won
the election even if no immigrants or co-ethnics had voted.)

At the national level, the political impact of new American and
co-ethnic communities is likely to remain minor for some time.
In 1988, for example, at the culmination of what had been her-
alded by many advocates as the â\200\234Decade of the Hispanic,â\200\235 the
only directly measurable impact of the Latino vote was to
give Spanish speaking Governor Michael Dukakis the
Democratic primary in Texas." Even in the 1996 Presidential
election, the only specific outcome of the immigrant and co-
ethnic vote was to give President Bill Clinton Arizona. The expla-
nation for this requires a bit of math. The ethnic vote is still a
relatively small part of the total electorate. If they are to deter-
mine an election, the partisan gap in the new American and
co-ethnic vote must be numerically larger than the opposing
gap among the much larger population of non-immigrant/co-
ethnic voters. This is likely only in very close elections that
mobilize the new Americans and co-ethnics.

At the state and local level, however, immigrant and co-ethnic
voters can and have played a more substantial role. Although
numerically small in the national population, the proportion
of Latino and Asian voters in certain states is quite high, rang-
ing (in 1992) from 9.6 percent in California, to 13.6 percent
in Texas, to 25.5 percent in New Mexico. Among recent state
and local results in which new Americans and co-ethnics played
a decisive role, several stand out: 1983 mayoral victories by
Harold Washington in Chicago and Federico Pefa in Denver;
the 1992 Colorado senatorial primary election of Ben Nighthorse
Campbell over former Governor Richard Lamm; the 1996 selec-
tions of Cruz Bustamante to be Californiaâ\200\231s first Latino speaker
of the Assembly and Martha Escutia to the chair of the Assemblyâ\200\231s

Judiciary Committee; and the election of Alex Penelas as Metro/Dade County mayor, also in 1996. There is also some impressionistic evidence that Latinos and Asians substantially increased their overall presence in state and local elected offices after the 1996 election, though the data will not be available until late 1997.

One cloud on the horizon for Latino and Asian representatives may be recent Supreme Court decisions striking down certain interpretations of the Voting Rights Act. Since 1982, the VRA has been interpreted by Congress to require the creation of minority electoral districts â\200\234where possible.â\200\235 If those racially or ethnically gerrymandered Congressional districts are dissolved, it is possible that the growth in the number of Latino representatives will fall below these populationsâ\200\235 current rates.

Policy Implications

Are naturalized immigrants, to the extent that they act collectively in the political arena, harbingers of political fragmentation, as some analysts seem to imply, or are they simply new Americans exercising their rights in a pluralistic democracy?

In the early years of the 20th century, there was fear in many quarters that immigrants threatened the nationâ\200\231s body politic. At that time, immigrants constituted a large proportion of those who belonged to and led radical political groups that rejected the constitutional basis of the U.S. political system. However, it is extremely doubtful whether such a charge could be sustained against immigrants today. In the recent mayoral race in

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Los Angeles, for example, Latinos voted disproportionately in favor of a school bond issue. More money for schools is hardly a subversive plank. More generally, it is clear from both their voting patterns and their stated policy preferences that Latino and Asian communities fall well within the mainstream of political behavior and beliefs.

Political parties ignore these emerging electorates at their peril.

One clue about the source of some of the anxiety that seems to attend increased rates of voting by immigrants can be gleaned from the following two snippets. A newsmagazine recently noted that â\200\234Liberal leaders of the Jewish organizations working to resettle [Russian immigrants] . . . maintain that the immigrants are politically inexperienced. Their ideological conservatism is dismissed as incoherent and typical of an immigrant mentality unfamiliar with democratic processes.â\200\235 John Sullivan, on the other hand, recently wrote in the National Review that â\200\234voting Republican is itself a sign of minority assimilation to the culture and identity of the American majority.â\200\235 It would appear that what some people think of immigrants voting depends on whether they have the â\200\234rightâ\200\235 political leanings.

Apart from partisan concerns, the anxieties that attend immigrant participation in the nationâ\200\231s political life often seem to arise out of wider intellectual preoccupations about the role of citizens in a representative democracy. For instance, some voice concern about the low rates in which certain immigrant groups participate in politics (by voting, but also by becoming informed on the issues, financially supporting candidates, and so on). Whether one believes that this is a problem or not depends on what one thinks about the civic duties associated with citizenship. Clearly, the more one believes in the importance of civic participation to the well-being of the republic, the more one would be inclined to view lack of participation as a serious social problem, one that might eventually call into question the legitimacy of representative institutions. On the other hand, the more minimalist oneâ\200\231s notion of civic responsibility, the less concerned one might be about certain immigrant groupsâ\200\231 lack of participation in the political process. As one social scientist quipped: â\200\234What difference does another two million non-voters make?â\200\235

These philosophical issues are clearly not specific to immigrants: low participation rates by the native-born is also a matter of concern. Nevertheless, they have implications for immigration policy. For example, concern about low levels of immigrant participation might lead one to make public and private

sector investments in the civic education of newcomers to encourage them to become involved in the nationâ\200\231s political life. The prospect of a strengthened sense of national unity and purpose could make such a course highly desirable.

Another question concerns the way in which the new Latino and Asian electorates will become more fully incorporated into the political life of the nation. There are several historical models. One might be the political incorporation of women following the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. Their enfranchisement had relatively little impact on electoral politics in the first decade or two, since, with few exceptions, their political behavior broke along the same lines as that of men within their socio-economic group. African Americans, on the other

hand, became a relatively unified voting bloc following the 1965 Voting Rights Act. As they became sufficiently distinct from the general electorate they and their allies significantly influenced public policy regarding race, poverty, and other social issues.

A third model presents itself: at the dawn of the 20th century, the Italians and the Irish, among other groups, voted en bloc for their own "favorite son" candidates. These voters then formed part of the New Deal coalition of the 1930s and participated in the realignment of the nation's politics. Eventually, they were fully incorporated into the nation's broader political system through the party machines and patronage system. As Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan have exhaustively demonstrated, this process often resulted in a de facto divvying up of offices (and patronage) along ethnic lines. Yet far from promoting ethnic separatism or fragmentation, it was through this process of political organization and cultural reaffirmation that immigrant groups succeeded in becoming more fully incorporated in the American mainstream. As Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut have explained, "Defense of their own particular interests defined along ethnic lines was the school in which many immigrants and their descendants learned to identify with the interests of the nation as a whole."

It is too early to speak authoritatively about which of these models the new immigrants will follow, or whether they will become politically incorporated in a wholly novel manner. Only two things seem clear: first, unless the parties themselves reach out and bring these groups into the "mainstream," their political incorporation will be episodic, incomplete, and more torturous than it ought to be; second, political parties ignore these emerging electorates at their long-term peril. This convergence of interests as both the political parties and co-ethnic politicians seek to gain the support of these voters should have powerful repercussions for the system of partisan coalition-building that is U.S. politics.