

## Variations in Political Involvement and Attitudes among Latinos by Place of Birth and Citizenship: Findings from the Chicago-Area Survey

### Introduction

This paper elaborates on "Preliminary Explorations of Latinos and Politics" (Latino Research @ ND, Vol. 4, No. 1, March 2007) by John Garcia and Rodney Hero, based on the Chicago-Area Survey (CAS).<sup>1</sup> Here we further examine the findings discussed in that paper by differentiating the behavior and attitudes



1 The 2003 Chicago-Area Survey was a randomized sample of 1,512 Latino, 411 non-Latino white, and 403 non-Latino black households in metropolitan Chicago (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties). The lines of inquiry and questionnaire were designed by a group of scholars working with the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Field work was conducted by NuStats Corporation of Austin, Texas. Approximately 21,750 households were eligible for interviewing. A total of 2,326 interviews were completed among Latinos, whites, and blacks in the Chicago region. Respondents were 18 years and older; interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish. For more detailed information about the survey visit the website: <http://www.nd.edu/~latino/CAS>. Survey data in this report are from the 1,512 surveys completed among Latino respondents.

of US-born Latinos from those of the foreign born and those of citizens from those of noncitizens. Fifty-one percent of CAS respondents are foreign-born or first-generation Latinos. Thirty-one percent of first-generation Latinos are naturalized citizens. Overall, 65 percent of CAS respondents are citizens.<sup>2</sup>

2 According to the 2000 Census, 55 percent of adult Latinos in metropolitan Chicago are citizens; 65 percent of adult Latinos are foreign-born; 29 percent of foreign-born adult Latinos are citizens.

## Electoral Activities

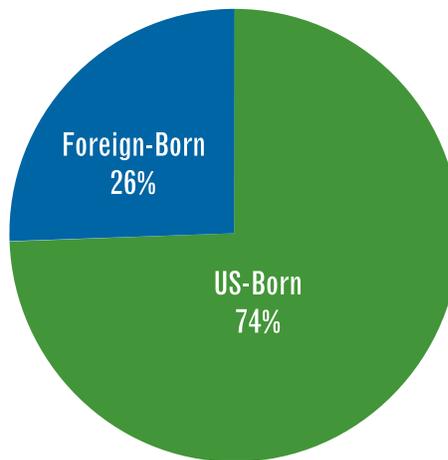
Overall, 45 percent of CAS respondents reported that they are registered to vote and 37 percent reported having voted in the 2000 presidential election. Although only 49 percent of all Latino CAS respondents were born in the United States, 74 percent of registered voters were US-born (Figure 1), as were 74 percent of those who reported having voted in the 2000 presidential election. These numbers are not surprising in that 75 percent of Latino citizens were born in the United States.

When we examine variations based on place of birth we find that 67 percent of the US born reported that they are registered to vote and 54 percent reported having voted in 2000 (Figure 2). This compares to 23 percent of the foreign born who are registered and 20 percent who reported having voted in 2000.

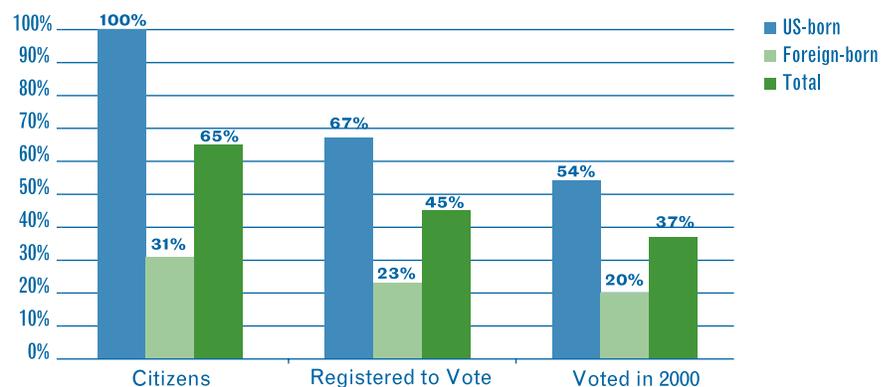


The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

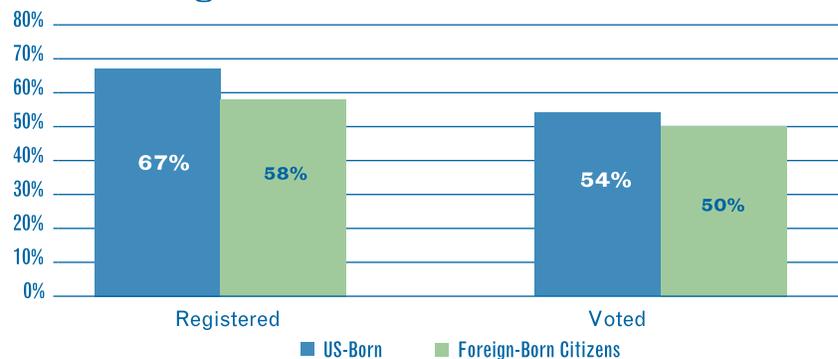
**Figure 1**  
**Place of Birth of Latino Registered Voters**



**Figure 2**  
**Latino Citizenship, Voter Registration, and Voting by Place of Birth**



**Figure 3**  
**Percentage of US- and Foreign-Born Citizens Who Are Registered to Vote and Who Voted in 2000**



Comparing voter registration rates and the voting behavior of US- and foreign-born Latino citizens only, we see that two-thirds of US-born Latinos are registered to vote, compared to 58 percent of foreign-born citizens (Figure 3). However, when we examine the percentage who voted in 2000, the difference between US-born

and foreign-born citizens nearly disappears. Although foreign-born Latino citizens are less likely to be registered to vote and, overall, slightly less likely to have voted in 2000, foreign-born registered voters appear to be somewhat more likely to have voted in 2000 than US-born registered voters.

## Political Party Preferences

### Differences in Political Party Affiliation

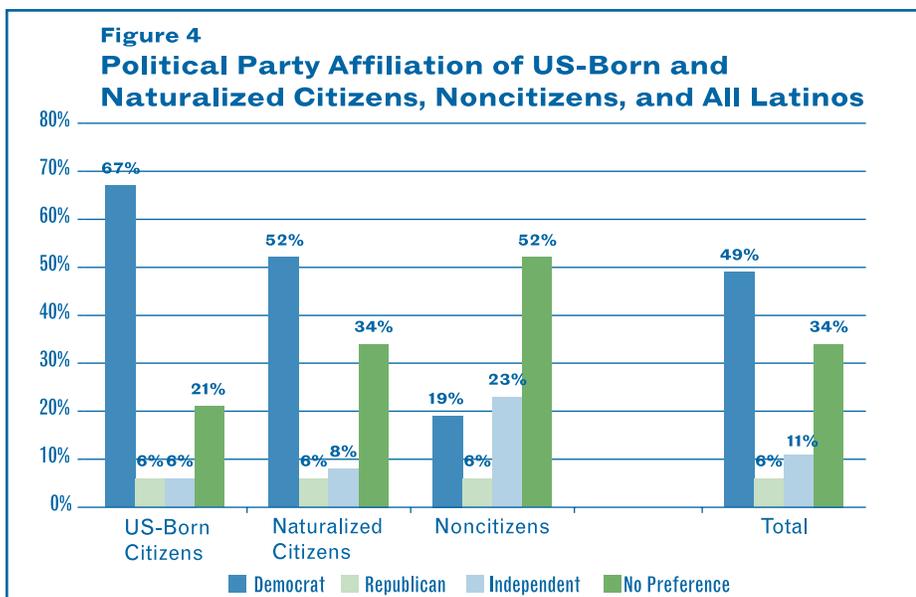
Nearly half of all Latino CAS participants expressed a preference for the Democratic Party, compared to only 6 percent who identified with the Republican Party. Approximately one-third had no party preference, and 11 percent stated that they were political independents. As illustrated in Figure 4, however, party preference varies greatly within the Chicago-area Latino population, depending

on citizenship status and whether one was born in the United States or in another country. The biggest differences are between citizens and noncitizens.

It is perhaps not surprising that noncitizens were far less likely than citizens to express a political party preference. Over half of noncitizens stated that they had no political party preference or that they did not know. In addition, nearly a

quarter of noncitizens stated that they were political independents. Only 25 percent of noncitizens expressed a preference for either the Democratic or Republican parties. Among those who had a preference, Democrats were preferred over Republicans by a margin of three to one.

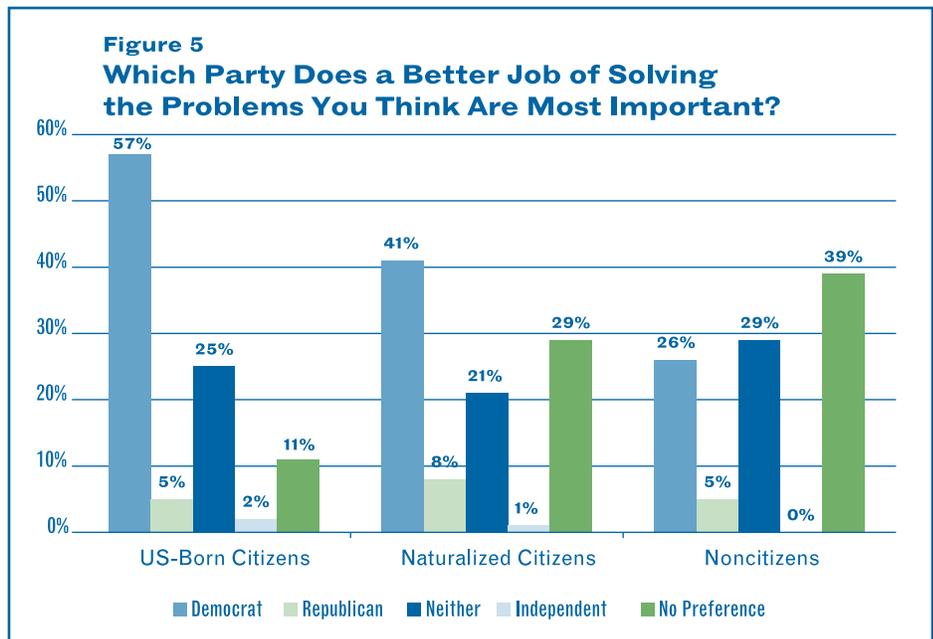
A rather different picture emerges among citizens, although there were significant differences between the US-born and naturalized citizens. Although the Republican Party was preferred by only 6 percent of both US-born and naturalized citizens, the US born were substantially more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than were naturalized citizens. Two-thirds of US-born Latinos identified with the Democrats compared to slightly more than half of naturalized citizens. In contrast, one-third of naturalized citizens expressed no political party preference, compared to only 21 percent of the US born.



## Differences in Evaluation of Political Party Performance

A similar pattern to that described above for political party affiliation emerges with regard to CAS respondents' answers to the question, "Which political party do you think does a better job of solving the problems you think are most important?"

Only 5 percent to 8 percent of all groups expressed the belief that the Republicans did a better job of solving problems important to them. In contrast, the Democrats are favorably assessed by nearly 6 in 10 US-born Latinos and more than 40 percent of Latino naturalized citizens. As with political party affiliation, the great majority (68 percent) of noncitizens expressed no preference for either the Democrats or the Republicans,



as did more than half of naturalized citizens. In contrast, 62 percent of US-born Latinos thought that one of the two parties (overwhelmingly,

the Democrats) did a better job of solving problems that are important to them.

## Political Attitudes



### Efficacy

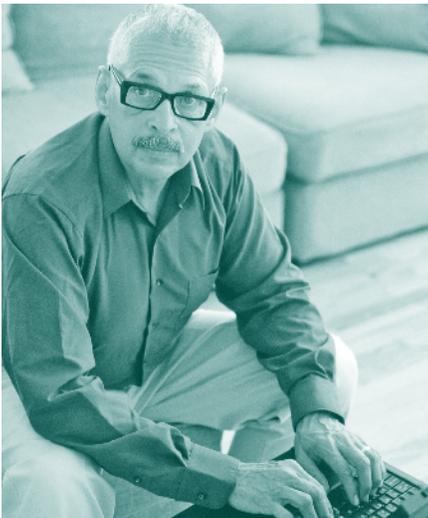
Respondents to the Chicago-Area Survey were asked about how much influence they believe they have in government and how much public officials care about what they think.

In response to the question, "How much say do you think people like you have in what the government does?" the US born are slightly more likely than those born outside of the United States to believe that they have at least some influence on what the government does. Nearly one-half of US-born

Latinos think that they have at least some influence compared to less than one-third of the foreign born (Figure 6). In contrast, more than one-third of the foreign born believe that they have no influence on government policies and actions compared to only one in five US-born Latinos.

According to a companion paper in this series, "Latino Civic and Community Involvement" (Timothy Ready, Roger Knight, and Sung-Chang Chun, Latino Research @ ND, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 2006), Chicago-area





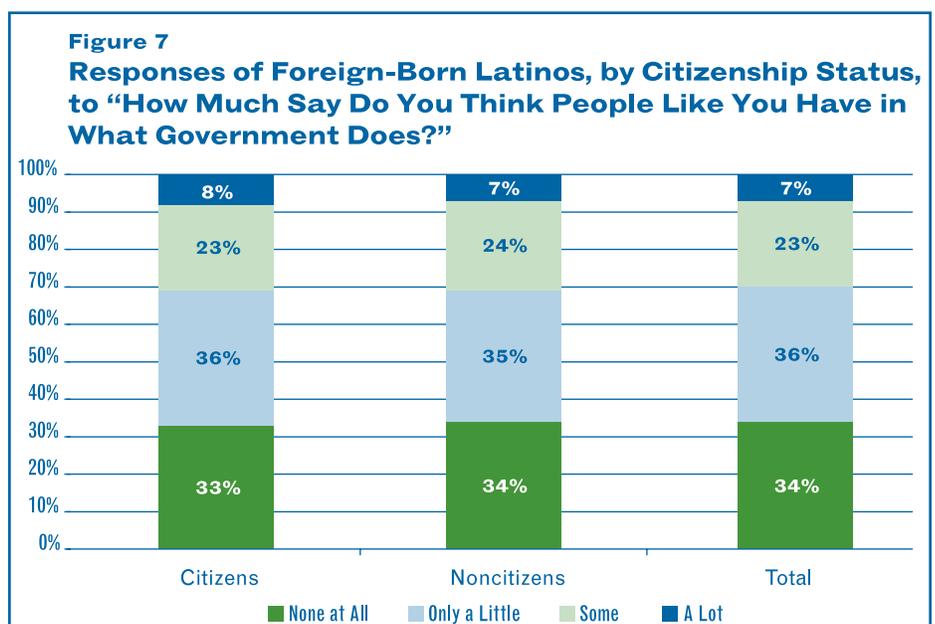
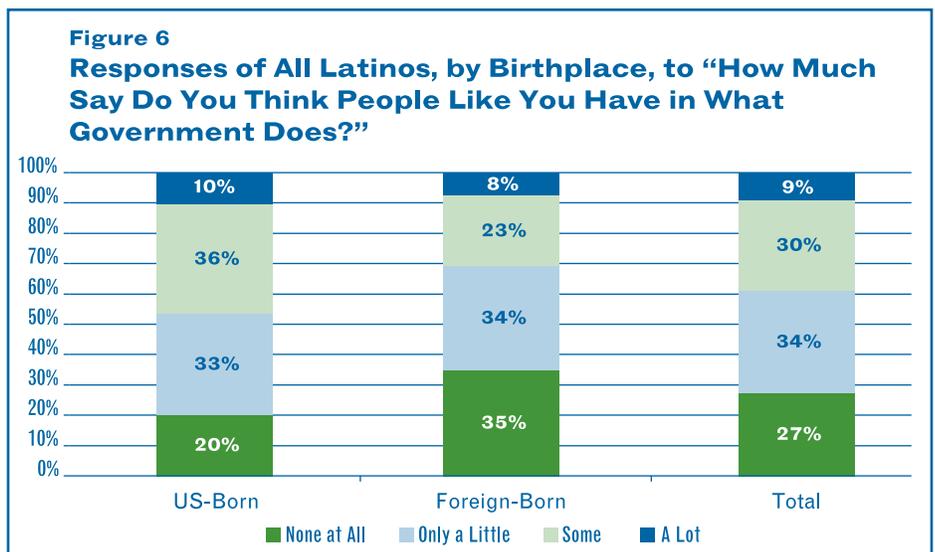
Latinos reported a stronger sense of efficacy with regard to their ability to make their communities better places to live than with regard to their ability to affect what government does. This is true for both US- and foreign-born Latinos. Thus it appears that Chicago-area Latinos may be more likely to become civically engaged through community organizations than through local, state, or national government. This is especially true of the foreign born but applies to the US born as well.

One might hypothesize that the difference between the sense of efficacy of US- and foreign-born Latinos is related to the fact that a majority of foreign-born Latinos are not citizens. This turns out not to be the case. The responses of foreign-born citizens are much more similar to those of noncitizens than they are to US-born Latinos (Figure 7). One-third of both foreign-born citizens and noncitizens believe that they have no influence over government. Foreign-born Latino citizens and noncitizens alike

are less likely than their US-born counterparts to believe that they have very much impact over what government does.

Chicago-area Latinos, in general, do not believe that public officials care much about what they think. Nearly three in ten believe that government officials do not care at all about their views, and two-thirds said that they thought

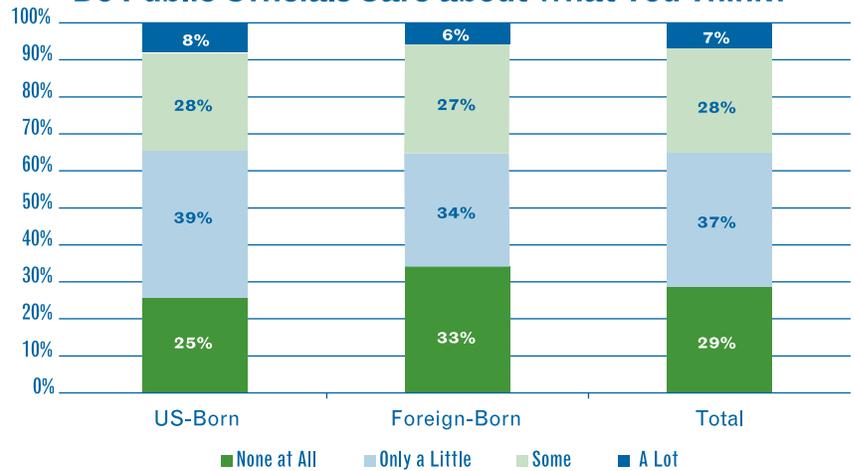
that public officials cared “only a little,” at most. About one-third of both the US born and foreign born believe that public officials care “a lot” or at least “some” about what they think. However, one-third of the foreign born thought that public officials did not care at all, compared to one-fourth of the US born.



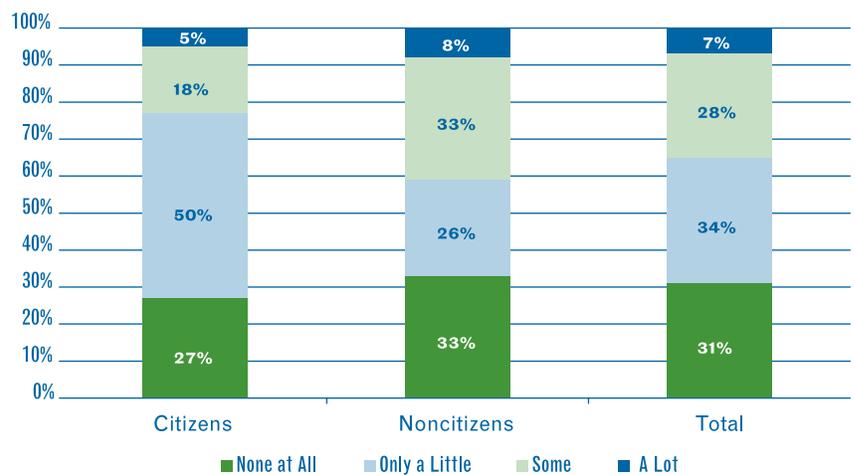


In support of the mission of the Institute for Latino Studies and the Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR), the Research team provides policy-relevant information and analysis about Latino communities and issues affecting their well-being. The team both contributes to studies originating from the Institute's other programs and centers and from IUPLR member institutions and carries out its own independent projects.

**Figure 8**  
**Responses of All Latinos, by Birthplace, to**  
**“Do Public Officials Care about What You Think?”**



**Figure 9**  
**Responses of Foreign-Born Latinos, by Citizenship**  
**Status, to “Do Public Officials Care about What**  
**You Think?”**



Surprisingly, foreign-born noncitizens were more likely to believe that public officials care at least “some” about what they think than were foreign-born (naturalized) citizens. However, as was true with regard to political efficacy, noncitizens were more likely than naturalized citizens to believe that public officials cared “not at all” about their views.



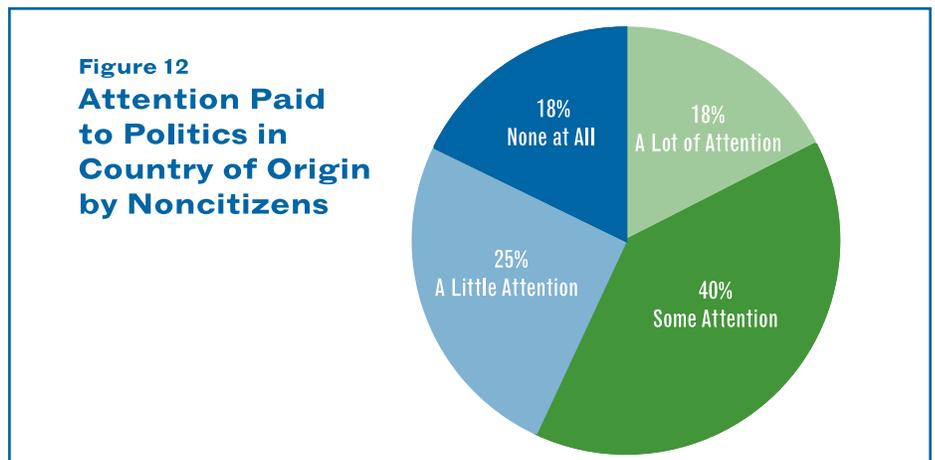
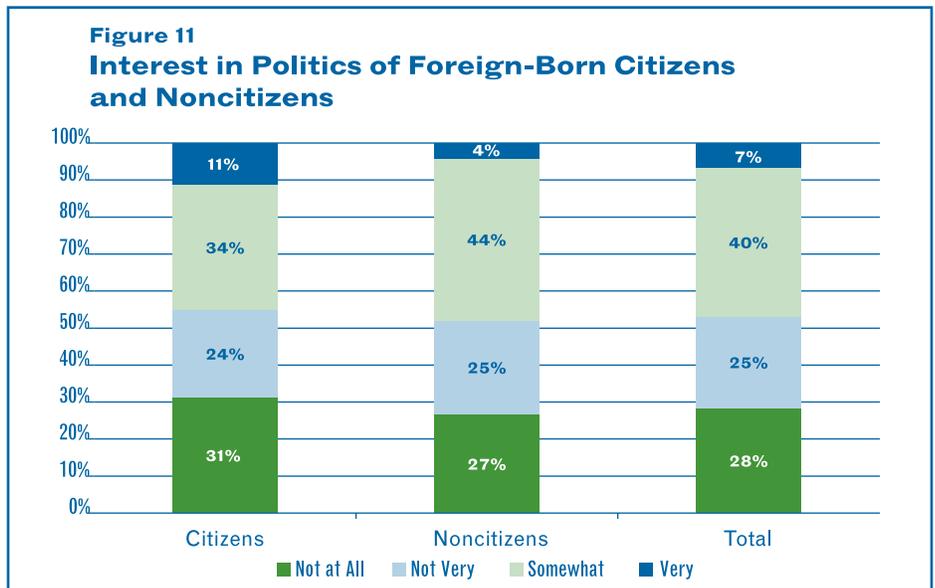
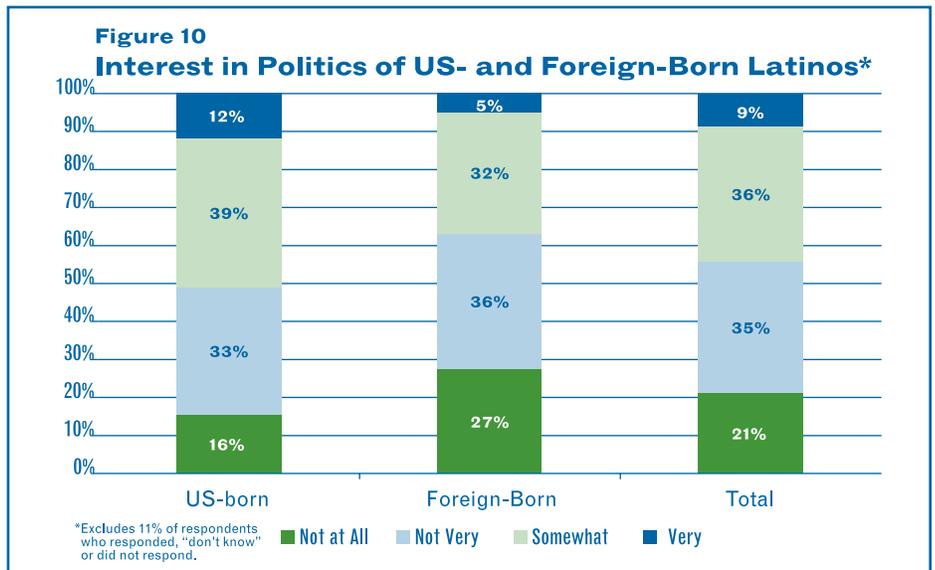
# Political Interests and Awareness

## Interest in Politics

How interested in politics are Latinos? Nearly 60 percent of all CAS Latinos claimed to have little or no interest in politics, a little more than one-third are “somewhat interested,” and less than 10 percent are “very interested” (Figure 10). The US born are twice as likely as the foreign born to be “very interested” in politics, yet little more than one in ten US-born Latinos claim to be “very interested.” In contrast, more than one-fourth of foreign-born Latinos are “not at all” interested in politics, compared to less than 20 percent of the US born.

Differences between foreign-born Latino citizens and noncitizens are surprisingly small and are consistent with previous findings. Foreign-born citizens are more likely to be very interested in politics, although those who are “very interested” constitute only 11 percent of all foreign-born citizens. Thirty-one percent of foreign-born citizens are “not at all interested” in politics, a slightly higher percentage than that of noncitizens.

Foreign-born Latinos who are not citizens were also asked how much attention they pay to politics in their country of origin. Although the wording of this question is slightly different from that of the question about interest in politics in the United States, it appears that foreign-born Latinos who are not citizens may be at least as interested in politics in their home countries as they are in the politics of metropolitan Chicago, Illinois, and the United States.



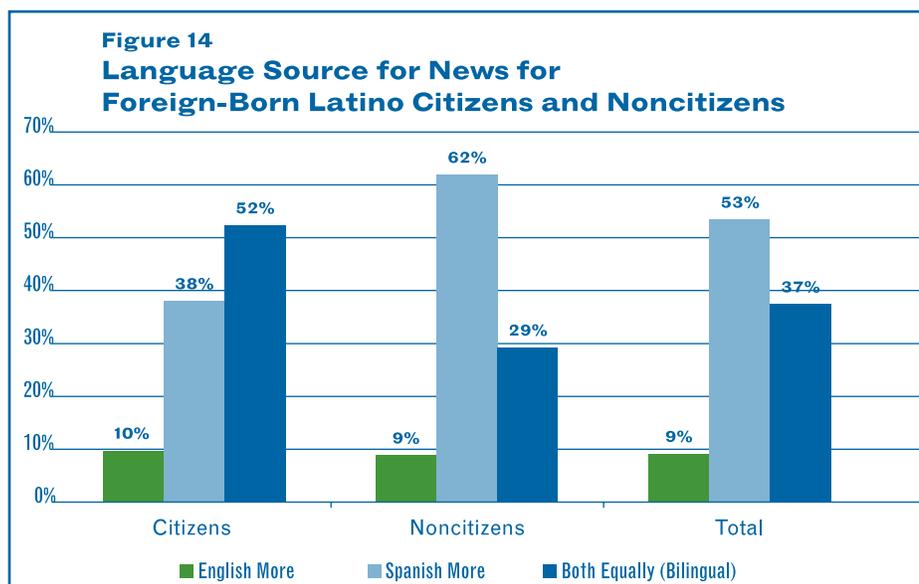
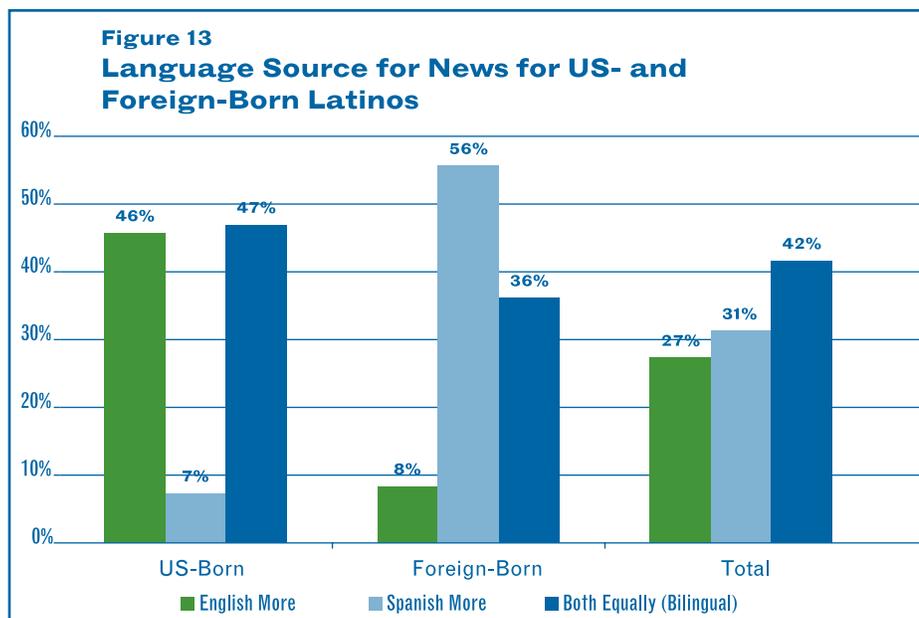
## Television News and Language Medium

The gathering of information about politics and civic affairs is an important element of political engagement. As reported by Garcia and Hero in their “Preliminary Exploration of Latinos and Politics” in this series (Vol. 4, No. 1, March

2007), television is the most important source of news for Latinos and Latinos are regular viewers of television news. More than 80 percent of Chicago-area Latinos watch the news every day or nearly every day.

Spanish-language media are important sources of news for both US-born and foreign-born Latinos. Well over half of foreign-born Latinos get most or all of their news in Spanish, while only 8 percent rely primarily on English-language sources (Figure 13). Just under half (47 percent) of US-born Latinos stated that they are equally likely to get their news in English or in Spanish and an additional 7 percent rely primarily on Spanish-language sources of news; 46 percent indicated that they rely primarily on English-language media.

Foreign-born Latino citizens and noncitizens differ with each other with regard to language source for news (Figure 14). Although only around 10 percent of both groups rely primarily on English-language media, over half of foreign-born citizens state that they rely on English- and Spanish-language media equally, while 62 percent of noncitizens rely primarily on Spanish-language media. It is likely that this is at least partly explained by the fact that, on average, foreign-born citizens have been in the United States much longer than noncitizens.

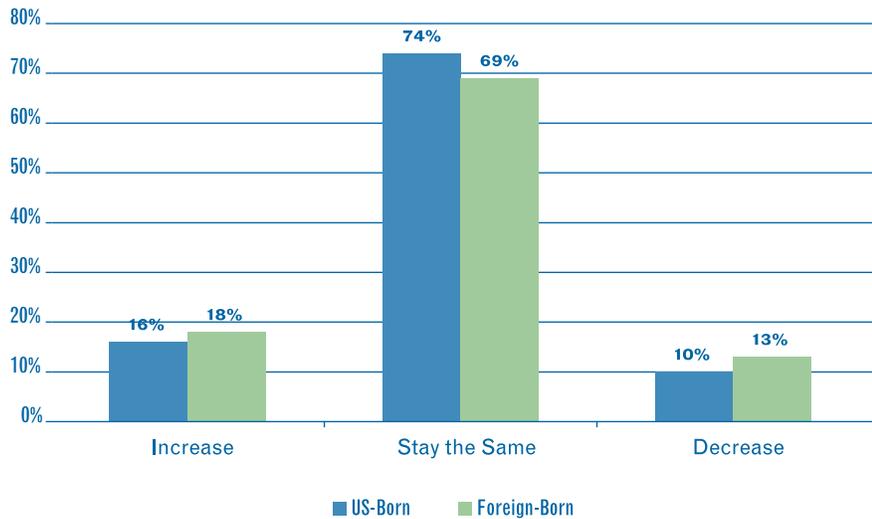




## Views on Immigration Policy

There is little difference between US-born and foreign-born Latinos with regard to their views on immigration. Overwhelmingly, Latinos of all backgrounds believe that immigration is good for the United States and would prefer that current levels of immigration be maintained. Of those who had an opinion (10 percent of respondents did not have an opinion), approximately 90 percent of both the US born and foreign born believe that immigration is good for the country. Nearly three-quarters of the US born think that current immigration levels should be maintained, and an additional 16 percent think that they should be increased. Between 70 percent and 75 percent of citizens, both US-born and naturalized, believe that present levels of immigration should be maintained, with an additional

**Figure 15**  
**Level of Immigration Should Increase or Stay the Same**



15 percent to 20 percent thinking that it should be increased. The views of noncitizens are similar.

Given the overwhelmingly positive views toward immigration held by Latinos of all backgrounds, it is perhaps not surprising that hundreds of thousands of Chicago-area Latinos would mobilize less than three years later (in 2006) to oppose efforts to restrict immigration.

## About the Researchers

**Timothy Ready** is senior researcher at the Institute for Latino Studies. Before coming to Notre Dame, he was senior program officer in the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education at the National Research Council of The National Academies. During the 1990s he directed the campaign of the Association of American Medical Colleges to increase racial and ethnic diversity in US medical schools and created a national network of community partnerships to increase the number of students both interested in and academically prepared to pursue careers in the health professions. He was a faculty member in the Department of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America and has researched and written on Latino health and education issues in South Texas, Washington DC, and Chicago.



**Roger Knight** holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of Notre Dame, and he has quantitative research experience in a variety of topics regarding the Hispanic population in the United States.



In 2006 he became a regular contributor to the National Society for Hispanic Professionals' website. In addition, he has professional experience in qualitative evaluation and research at a large educational institution. Knight has previously held positions in database management and data analysis. His interests lie in research methodologies, particularly in human services evaluation and educational research and, more recently, labor market outcomes and other issues related to Hispanic professionals.



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## Summary and Conclusion

Latinos in the Chicago area have relatively low levels of participation in electoral politics. This is largely, but not entirely, explained by the fact that a high percentage of Latino adults are not citizens. However, as discussed by Garcia and Hero, levels of voter registration and actual voting activity for Chicago-area Latinos who are citizens still seem to be somewhat low relative to Latinos elsewhere. Further, a high percentage of both the US born and foreign born, citizens and noncitizens, believe that politicians do not care about what they think and that they can have little effect on what government does. The level of interest in politics for all is low, especially for the foreign born,

and the sense of political efficacy of the foreign born is somewhat lower than that of the US born. Surprisingly, the sense of efficacy of noncitizens is only slightly lower, not dramatically lower, than that of naturalized citizens.

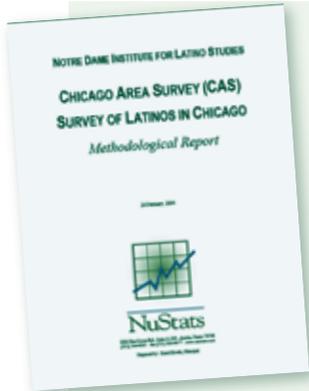
Despite all of the above, Latinos of all backgrounds report that they regularly watch the television to get news about politics. Spanish-language media are a very important source of political information not only for the foreign born but for the US born as well.

The great majority of noncitizens have no preference for either the Democratic or Republican parties. In contrast, citizens, especially the US-born, strongly prefer the Democratic

Party. While support for the Democratic Party varies greatly among Chicago-area Latinos by place of birth and citizenship, only about 6 percent of Latinos of any background expressed a preference for the Republican Party.

Latino political clout in the Chicago area will grow dramatically in the coming years. Although a majority of Chicago-area adults are foreign born and many are not citizens, 84 percent of Latinos under 18 years of age in the Chicago area are US-born citizens. While the level of involvement of Chicago-area Latino citizens in electoral politics is relatively low, their involvement in civic affairs and community issues is more extensive (see “Latino Civic and Community Involvement” in this series, Vol. 3, No. 4, December 2006). The potential coalescing of Latino political power through electoral politics as well as through other forms of civic engagement is enormous and is increasingly becoming manifest, as evidenced by survey responses to questions about immigration along with the 2006 mass mobilization in support of immigration rights.





## Summary Points

According to the 2003 Chicago-Area Survey (CAS):

Just over one-quarter of Latino registered voters in the Chicago area were born outside the US.

Foreign-born Latino citizens are somewhat less likely to register and to vote than Latinos born in the United States.

Noncitizens are less likely than citizens to express a political party preference.

Among citizens, the US born are substantially more likely than naturalized citizens to identify with the Democratic Party.

Foreign-born Latinos have lower levels of interest and confidence in the political process than the US born.

Naturalized citizens' sense of political efficacy is only slightly higher than that of noncitizens.

Overwhelmingly, Latinos believe that immigration is good for the United States, with little difference between the US and foreign born or citizens and noncitizens on this issue.

Although a majority of Chicago-area Latino adults are foreign born and many are noncitizens, 84 percent of Latinos under the age of 18 are US-born citizens and therefore potential voters.

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