

## **Chapter 7**

### **Why California Matters: How California Latinos Influence the Presidential Election**

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### Introduction

As was the case in 2000, California was again a safe Democratic state in 2004. Although California provides 55 of the 270 Electoral College votes necessary to win the White House, or just over 20 percent, neither George W. Bush nor John Kerry spent much money in the state. In the most expensive presidential election in the nation's history where campaigns spent a combined total of over \$600 million, less than \$1 million, a mere two percent of total campaign advertising expenditures, was spent in the Golden State. Early polls showed Kerry with a 15-point margin over Bush (DiCamillo and Field 2004; Los Angeles Times 2004). By comparison, more than \$40 million was spent in Ohio, \$50 million in Florida, and \$60 million in Pennsylvania—all states that were much more competitive. In the end, Kerry handily won California by more than one million votes.

Throughout the campaign, however, California was a focus of attention for fundraising by both presidential campaigns. The Kerry-Edwards campaign raised a full 20 percent of all of its contributions from California, a larger proportion than it received from any other state. Bush-Cheney received 13 percent of all of its contributions from California; only Texas provided more money to the Bush campaign than did the nation's most populous state (Doug 2004).

One could also make the argument that California was relevant to the 2004 campaign as a target of attack for the GOP, and especially the Bush campaign, as both used gay marriage as part of their overall appeal to maintain traditional "family values" (Debate 2004). It was in San Francisco that Mayor Gavin Newsom used his authority to legalize gay marriage. Pictures of lesbians and gay men standing on the steps of San

Francisco City Hall appeared in many newspapers across the entire nation (CNN 2004a). Although the California courts would soon overturn his decision (Case 4265 2005), the episode served as further evidence that on issues related to sexuality, portions of California were at a point quite different from the majority preferences of voters in many other states. We must remember that eleven states enacted legal bans on gay marriage in popular referendums held at the same time as the 2004 presidential election.

It was not surprising, therefore, when many scholars, pollsters, and pundits stated that 2004 once again demonstrated that Latino voters in California, like the state as a whole, were largely irrelevant in the national election (Helton 2004) and may have suffered because neither fundraising nor gay marriage were especially relevant to Latinos. Thus, to the extent that these issues influenced the state's marginal role in the election and were used to mobilize conservative white voters in other states, Latinos may have been even more marginalized than were other California Democrats.

We argue, however, that this characterization of the limited impact of Latino voters in the 2004 election in California is incorrect in four distinct respects, which we explore in this chapter. First, Latino voters were again a critically important contributor to the statewide electoral majority that keeps the largest state in the nation a safe Democratic state. Continuing a pattern set in the mid-1990s, Latinos have consistently voted at a two-to-one rate in favor of Democrats in major elections. Moreover, the projected growth in Latino population and related statewide electoral influence suggest that Latinos are likely to continue to be a major contributor to California remaining a safe Democratic state (see Appendix A for overall statistics on the Latino and non-Latino population and electorate in California).

Second, Latino voters in California not only remained loyal Democrats, they also sustained their co-ethnic representational gains for yet another election cycle.

Interestingly, this does not occur for Latinos in both political parties. While elected Anglo Republicans replaced Latino Republicans, Latino candidates successfully won, and defended most of their Democratic seats at both Congressional and state legislative levels. As a result, California's Latinos have further solidified their influence within the national and state legislative delegations of the Democratic Party. In addition, the Democratic preferences of Latino voters demonstrated in the 2004 election in California continue to provide a direct incentive to the Republican Party to further consider how it can best integrate more Latinos within its ranks (Nuño 2007). Despite the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor in the recall election of 2003, Republicans are still at a systematic disadvantage relative to Democrats. Latino voters in California serve as a constant reminder to the Republicans of the long-term costs of becoming tagged the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino party, whose statewide victory is possible only with a solid white block vote.

Third, as a safe Democratic state, California sets fundamental parameters within which all presidential and related national campaigning occurs. Primary among these is setting the baseline strategy for campaign spending in more competitive states. When California is not in play, both political parties can spend substantial sums of money elsewhere, free to focus on more competitive states. Interestingly, however, California was still a critical state to *both* political parties in national legislative elections. California provides among the largest number of both Democrat and Republican members to the House of Representatives. California voters still drive the national

legislative influence of both political parties in fundamental ways. At present, California sends thirty-three Democrats and twenty Republicans to the House. Only Texas, which sent twenty-one to the House after the 2003 redistricting (and reduced to nineteen after the 2006 midterm elections), sends more Republicans to the federal lower chamber.

Finally, we conclude our essay by looking forward to the next two presidential elections in 2008 and 2012. How likely is it that Latino voters will keep California as a solidly blue, Democratic state? How many Latino voters does the Republican Party need to consistently recruit to significantly enhance its statewide competitiveness in the most populous state in the nation? What strategies might be most effective in using appeals to Latino voters to either keep them loyal Democrats or to provide them incentives to become Republican partisans? The answers to these questions point to the influential role that Latino voters will play in future California and national politics.

#### **The Latino Vote in California: 1980–2004**

In 2004, Latinos in California voted heavily in favor of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry over Republican George W. Bush. While the exact results of the Latino vote are not known due to questions surrounding exit polling techniques in 2004 (Olivera 2004; Gomez 2004; see Leal et. al. 2005 for a comparative analysis of polls conducted in 2004), all polls noted a consistent pattern of Kerry support. Comparing four polls of Latinos in this state, and conducting our analysis of precinct returns, we estimate that Kerry won the Latino vote in California by a margin of 72 percent to 27 percent (see Table 1). Although the state of California and its fifty-five electoral votes went to the Democrats, 54 to 45 percent, neither the Latino vote nor the state as a whole were always a sure thing for the Democrats. According to polling data from the Field Poll, after

winning the presidential election in 1980, California native Ronald Reagan raised his share of the Latino vote from 35 percent to 45 percent in 1984 while carrying 59 percent of the entire state. Since then, the Latino partisan preferences have become markedly more Democratic, while their share of the overall state electorate has doubled (Barreto and Ramírez 2004).

**Table 1**

**California Latino Vote in 2004 Presidential Election**  
(Results of polls in CA and authors' own analysis)

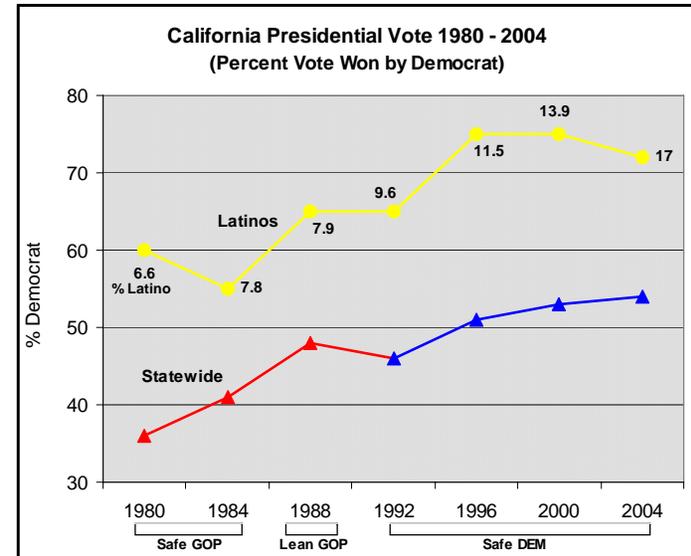
	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Bush</u>	<u>% of state</u>
National Exit Poll	63	32	21
Los Angeles Times	68	31	14
Willie C. Velasquez	71	27	19
Tomás Rivera (pre-election)	76	23	n/a
Precinct Analysis	74	25	16
<i>Barreto et al. estimate</i>	72	27	17

After 1996, when Latinos comprised more than 10 percent of all voters in the state, and because more than 70 percent of them voted Democratic, it is no coincidence that California became an easy win for the Democrats. As Latino voter registration grew in the mid-to-late 1990s, the Republican Party continued to emphasize anti-immigrant ballot measures that lead new Latino registrants to check the “Democrat” box on their registration cards (Segura, Falcon and Pachon 1999; Ramírez 2002; Barreto and Woods 2005). In an analysis of voter registration records in Los Angeles County between 1992 and 1998, Barreto and Woods (2005) found that just ten percent of new Latino registrants affiliated with the Republican Party as a direct result of the three so-called “anti-Latino” propositions in California. What’s more, the anti-Latino initiatives motivated many new Latinos to vote. Pantoja, Ramírez, and Segura (2001) found that Latinos who naturalized

and registered to vote during the 1990s were significantly more likely to turnout and vote, compared to immigrant Latino voters in other states. The result was more Latinos registering and voting as Democrats than in previous years.

However, the 2000 election suggested that the anti-Latino era might be over. Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush used his closeness and understanding of Latino voters in Texas to rally support for the Republican ticket in the Latino community—quite the opposite of the Republican strategy during California Governor Pete Wilson’s administration from 1991-1999 (Nuño 2007). Even as Bush attempted to introduce a new compassionate face to the Republican Party, the California Republican Party had an image problem with Latino voters.

**Figure 1**



A survey conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute during the 2000 election revealed that 53 percent of Latino voters in California still associated the Republican Party with former Governor Pete Wilson, a chief proponent of the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 (TRPI 2000). The result was strong support for Democrat Al Gore by Latino voters in 2000, propelling the Democrats to their third straight victory in California after losing the state in 1980, 1984, and 1988. Figure 1 thus illustrates that as the Latino vote grows in influence, California becomes a more Democratic state.

In addition to voting in presidential elections, Latinos in California have also become consistent Democratic voters in other statewide elections since the Reagan era. Statewide results indicate that Latinos voted two-to-one on average in support of Democratic candidates for Governor and U.S. Senate for every election between 1992 and 2002 (Barreto and Ramírez in 2004). While some may view the 2003 Gubernatorial Recall election as a potential shift away from the Democratic Party (Marinucci 2003), most analysis now concurs that the circumstances and context of this election were so unique that inferring trends from the 2003 Recall election is not valid, and further that the Republican surge was not long lasting (Kousser 2006). However, the Recall election does highlight just how important Latino voters are to the Democratic Party in California; in part due to the approximately ten-point drop in Latino support rates for Democratic candidates, Democratic Governor Gray Davis was recalled from office and replaced with Republican candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger (DeSipio and Masuoka 2006). Had Latinos turned out at just slightly greater rates, and voted at their average support rate for the Democratic candidates, Davis would not have been recalled. While the peculiarities of the 2003 Recall election are unlikely to ever be reproduced in a national presidential

election, the outcome reveals that Latinos are a key component to Democratic success in California.

### **The 2004 Election in California**

Although California had a new Republican Governor, given its vast size and expensive media markets, it was never considered to be in play during the 2004 presidential election. While Schwarzenegger gained office on a surge of anti-Gray Davis sentiment, this did not carry over to national Democratic figures, namely John Kerry. Instead, it was localized to California, and personalized specifically to unfavorable ratings and opinions of Democratic Governor Davis, resulting in his ouster in the 2003 Recall election. In August 2004, Republican Governor Schwarzenegger had a 65 percent approval rating, but Republican President Bush had just a 41 percent approval rating (Field Poll 2004). Thus, the national Republican Party was hard pressed to mount a re-election campaign for George W. Bush in the Golden State.

On the Democratic side, there was some chance that California would play an important role, as the primary election was held in March during the 2004 campaign cycle (although it was subsequently moved to June in 2006). However, with early victories in Iowa, New Hampshire, Arizona, Missouri, and New Mexico, John Kerry had virtually wrapped up the Democratic nomination, and his challengers had virtually dropped out of the contest before the California primary. On March 2, 2004 Kerry received 65 percent of the Democratic vote in California versus 20 percent for John Edwards, and 4 percent each for Howard Dean and Dennis Kucinich. Among Latinos, Kerry won 74 percent of the primary vote, higher support than among any other group of voters in California. Despite the impressive win, voters in California were not exposed to

a significant primary campaign for the Democratic nomination, a trend that continued into the general election in November.

Although the presidential election lacked visibility in California, Senator Barbara Boxer faced a re-election challenge from former Secretary of State Bill Jones, and both candidates spent millions of dollars on radio and television advertisements. Boxer, who had defeated Republican challenger Matt Fong by 10 points in 1998, increased her margin in 2004, defeating Jones by a 20-point margin (58 percent to 38 percent). Boxer won an estimated 71 percent of the Latino vote versus 23 percent for Jones. Two statewide initiatives concerning the expansion of casino gambling failed while an initiative to establish a stem cell research fund passed—all by healthy margins. In the closest election outcome among ballot initiatives, Proposition 72 concerning the expansion of health care coverage failed by less than one percent, with wide vote differences based on race and ethnicity. The Los Angeles Times exit poll estimated that 58 percent of Whites voted no on Prop 72, in contrast to 64 percent of Latinos who voted yes. Likewise, a majority of Black and Asian voters supported the health care initiative. In the state legislature, Democrats held on to their majority status, 48-32 in the Assembly and 25-15 in the Senate, with only a handful of competitive elections across the state.

In contrast to prior elections, there were no hotly contested or divisive statewide contests in 2004 to mobilize or demobilize Latino voters. However, given the history and growth of the Latino vote and Democratic support in California, there was nothing new in 2004 to suggest that voter participation would drop off significantly, or that support would shift to Bush.

Ties to the Democratic Party extend beyond vote preference from one election to the next, however. Latinos hold many key elected and appointed positions within the Democratic Party. While some are new faces, others have been encouraging Latinos to vote Democratic for more than 20 years. As their ranks grow within the party, Latinos help elect Latinos to office as Democrats, and Democratic Latino elected officials direct resources to registering and mobilizing Latino voters within the Democratic Party, thereby creating a kind of self-sustaining cycle. Although the Republican Party has started to make in-roads through the election of Latino Republicans to the state legislature, creating a potential for competition over Latino voters, to date only Latino Democratic representation has been sustained, while Latino Republican representation has merely been ad hoc.

#### **Sustained versus Ad Hoc Representation**

For any group, the first step towards representation is the election of a candidate from the group. The next, and perhaps more crucial step, is holding on to that representation. Since 1960, California has witnessed more than 4,000 elections for the state legislature and Congress, and in more than 1,000 cases there was an instance of turnover in which the office changed hands from one representative to another. By this we mean instances in which the incumbent lost, stepped down, or was forced out by term limits. When this vacancy exists, a good measure of institutional influence for any group is the extent to which the newly elected representative is similar to the previous representative. That is, how often can Blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans *sustain their influence* within California politics by keeping control of certain legislative seats? For Latinos, we divide the representatives into Democrats and Republicans. Since 1960 there

have been 80 Latino Democrats elected to legislative office (State and Congress), and there have been 53 instances in which a Latino Democratic seat has become open. In these instances of turnover, an outgoing Latino Democrat was replaced by a new Latino Democrat 81 percent of the time. In contrast, a Latino Republican has never replaced a Latino Republican (see Table 2). Thus, while Latinos have been able to *sustain* their representation and influence within the Democratic Party, Latino representation in the Republican Party has been pieced together from one district to another in an ad hoc fashion.

**Table 2**  
**Sustainability Rating of Minorities in California Legislature**

	<b>Total Black</b>	<b>Democ. Latino</b>	<b>Repub. Latino</b>	<b>Total Asian</b>
Total Elected	52	80	7	24
Current Incumbents	10	29	3	11
Turnover	41	53	5	13
Co-Ethnic Elected	35	43	0	0
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>85.4%</b>	<b>81.1%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>

Table 2 also shows that African-American representation has been sustained within the Democratic Party at levels even higher than that of Latino Democrats. Why, then, do many observers see the Latino constituency as more important to the future success of the Democrats? The answer lies in a second necessary component of influence: the relative size and/or growth rate of the Black and Latino vote. As Table 2 indicates, twenty-nine Latino Democrats are currently elected to state legislative and congressional districts, compared to only ten African Americans. On this dimension, it is clear that the Latino vote is not only larger but also growing steadily. This is not to

suggest that African Americans are not important partners in the Democratic coalition—indeed they are. Instead, we argue that only the Latino vote shows signs of solid support for Democratic candidates, sustained representation within the party, and an expanding share of the state electorate.

Table 3 reports population growth and voter registration growth in California over the last ten years, broken down by racial and ethnic group. While overall the state grew by nearly 15 percent (or 4.6 million people), it was almost entirely driven by Latino and Asian-American growth. Similarly, Latinos and Asian Americans are driving voter registration growth in the Golden State. Between 1994 and 2004, the state of California added an estimated 1.8 million new registered voters, of which 66 percent were Latino and 23 percent were Asian, leaving just 11 percent of new voters that were either White or Black (see Figure 2).

**Table 3**  
**Population and Voter Registration Growth 1994 – 2004, by Race/Ethnicity**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>White</b>
Population 1994	31,523,000	2,197,155	9,084,787	3,306,782	16,662,672
Population 2004	36,144,000	2,240,928	11,891,376	4,192,704	16,843,104
Growth	4,621,000	43,773	2,806,589	885,922	180,432
Growth Rate	14.7%	2.0%	30.9%	26.8%	1.1%
Voter Reg 1994	14,723,784	957,046	1,766,854	736,189	11,263,695
Voter Reg 2004	16,557,273	993,436	2,980,309	1,159,009	11,424,518
Growth	1,833,489	36,390	1,213,455	422,820	160,824
Growth Rate	12.5%	3.8%	68.7%	57.4%	1.4%

Thus, Latinos represent the “key” to sustaining a Democratic majority in California for two main reasons: first, they continue to demonstrate strong support for the Democratic Party, and second, they are the fastest growing segment of the California electorate.

To better assess the role of Latino partisan politics in California, a simple matrix can be used (see Figure 3). For each group in California—Anglos, Latinos, Blacks, and Asians—we gauge their current political status in two areas: percent of all voters and partisan influence, yielding a simple 2 x 2 table. A group can either be increasing or decreasing as a percentage of the electorate, and its partisan influence can be described as sustained or ad-hoc. Thus, racial and ethnic groups in California can be divided into four possible quadrants based on the matrix below: (a) growing/sustained; (b) decreasing/sustained; (c) growing/ad-hoc; and (d) decreasing/ad-hoc. For a group to be an important influence in state presidential-year politics, they need to be in Quadrant A—growing/sustained.

This is not to suggest that Anglos, as the largest voting bloc in the state, do not have important influence, but instead that White voters in California are not the reason California is a safe Democratic state. Because White voting patterns and representation are roughly split between the Democratic and Republican Parties, presidential candidates would have to spend millions of dollars, time, and resources campaigning for their votes. Further, despite Anglo dominance in the California legislature, the Democratic majority is in power precisely because of Latinos in the state, and many Latinos have risen to leadership positions within the State Assembly and State Senate (Pachon et al. 2004). As of 2004, Latinos held key posts such as Speaker of the Assembly, Majority Floor Leader,

Figure 2

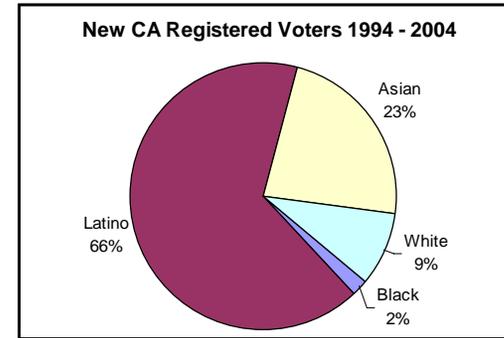


Figure 3

		Percent of all voters	
		Increasing (A)	Decreasing (B)
Partisan Influence	Sustained	<b>Latino Dems</b>	Black Dems
	Ad-hoc	Latino Reps Asian American	Anglo

and Chair of the Budget Committee, which demonstrates their sustained influence within the Democratic Party.

### **California and the National Campaign Strategy**

When California is locked up for the Democratic Party, both political parties actually gain. Although the Republican candidate would love to win the 55 electoral votes in California, from a resource perspective, it is better to spend elsewhere. Given the choice of spending tens of millions of dollars and losing California, or spending \$0 and still losing California, the candidate will always prefer to spend nothing. Just how expensive is California in a presidential race? While it is difficult to know the exact answer, a few good indicators are available. According to campaign finance analysis by California Common Cause (2003), more than \$80 million was raised and spent in the October 2003 Recall election (Wilson 2003). In 2005, when a special statewide election was called for eight propositions, more than \$100 million was spent, and estimates for the 2006 gubernatorial election put spending by the Republican Party *alone* at over \$120 million (Barabak and Finnegan 2006). To be competitive in California in 2004, each candidate (and supporting 527s) probably needed to spend a minimum of \$50 million and as much as \$100 million. This is due to the financial cost of running a campaign in the Golden State and airing expensive television commercials, as well as the additional costs of visiting the state and shaking hands from San Diego to San Francisco and everywhere in between.

Data compiled by the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) for 2004 found that in the final month of the 2004 campaign, over 250,000 ads were purchased and aired

by Kerry, Bush, and their affiliates; not a single ad appeared in the state of California, however. Spending on these ads in some of the most important “swing states” combined is probably in the range of what competing for votes in California would have cost. For instance, between September 26 and November 2, 2004 more than \$47 million was spent in Ohio, \$36 million in Pennsylvania, \$14 million in Wisconsin, \$8 million in New Mexico and \$8 million in Nevada (CNN.com 2004). Taken together, spending in these states totaled about \$115 million, probably a cheap estimate for campaigning in California in 2004.

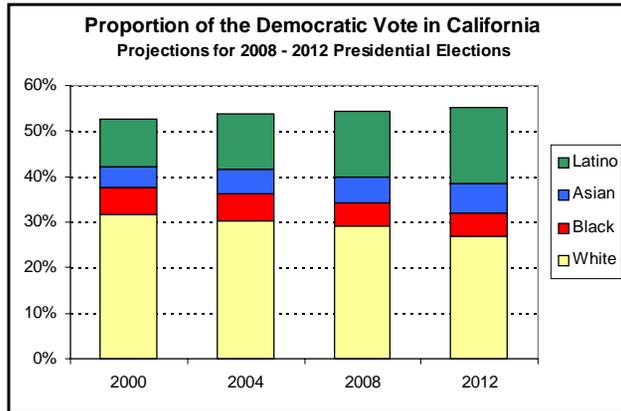
We argue that maintaining California as a safe-Democratic state frees up money and time that each campaign can better use in other competitive states. Further, as we have demonstrated above through voting patterns and representation trends, Latinos are the key partners in pushing California to the safe-Democratic status that it now holds.

### **Latinos and the California Vote in 2008 and 2012**

The discussion and data presented to this point have primarily focused on California politics in 2004 and before. The trends and historical data are informative not just for 2004, but also looking ahead to the next two presidential elections in 2008 and 2012. At a minimum, the Latino vote in California and, indeed, nationwide is expected to continue growing, likely gaining more influence and garnering more attention from the media and politicians. Given the growth in the Latino vote over the last decade in California, it is not unreasonable to anticipate that in 2008, one out of five voters will be Latinos, and that in 2012 Latinos may comprise 23 percent of the electorate. At the same time, the White proportion of the electorate will decline, and potentially drift towards the Republican Party (a trend already noticeable). As a result, the Latino influence in

maintaining California's status as a safe-Democratic state will increase even further because they would account for a larger share of the Democratic majority (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



In Table 4, we present our projections of the Latino vote and the California vote in 2008 and 2012. Using 2000 and 2004 as a baseline (as well as 1992 and 1996), we estimate the Latino electorate will grow from 14 percent in 2000 to 23 percent in 2012, and hold constant the vote for the Democratic candidate at 72 percent. If this is the case, California will become an even easier win for the Democratic Party in the next two presidential elections. In contrast, the Democratic vote of non-Latinos in the state is expected to hover right around the 50 percent mark (again based on historical data and trends). In fact, Latinos are likely to be the primary racial/ethnic group keeping California a blue state in 2008 and beyond. While African Americans might vote

Democratic at over 80 percent, they account for less than 7 percent of all voters in the state. If these projections become reality, the California and national GOP will be forced to reassess their outreach and recruitment strategies vis-à-vis Latinos.

Table 4

Year	Percent Latino	Percent Vote for Democrat		
		Latino	Non-Latino	State
2000	14%	75%	49%	53%
2004	17%	72%	50%	54%
2008	20%	72%	50%	54%
2012	23%	72%	50%	55%

Year	Percent Black	Percent Vote for Democrat		
		Black	Non-Black	State
2000	7%	85%	51%	53%
2004	7%	85%	52%	54%
2008	6%	85%	52%	54%
2012	6%	85%	53%	55%

Year	Percent Asian	Percent Vote for Democrat		
		Asian	Non-Asian	State
2000	7%	65%	52%	53%
2004	8%	65%	53%	54%
2008	9%	65%	53%	54%
2012	10%	65%	54%	55%

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have focused on why California matters to the national election and how Latino voters are the key component. We presented three reasons why this is the case. First, at the individual level, Latino voting patterns have remained consistently in favor of Democratic candidates, and their proportion of the electorate continues to grow. Second, Latino influence in California politics is not only on the rise (the fastest growing segment of the electorate), but Latino representation within the Democratic

Party is sustained. While elected Latino Republicans have always been replaced by Anglo Republicans, Latinos have successfully won and defended almost all of their Democratic seats, thereby *sustaining* their influence within the Democratic Party.

Third, even as an uncompetitive state, California has a considerable influence on the national election because when the state is out of play, candidates are free to campaign effectively in at least six or seven other states. If California were only a Democratic-leaning state, the Democratic Party would surely spend tens of millions of dollars to ensure it remained Democratic and win its 55 electoral votes, thereby expending money, time, personnel, and other resources that could be used in other, more competitive, states. The lack of a vigorous presidential campaign in California in 2004 may have indicated that the California Latino vote was again irrelevant to the national election. However, this chapter offers an alternative framework to assess the relevance of Latino voters. We conclude that the growth and marked Democratic partisanship of the Latino electorate in California did influence the national presidential campaign in 2004 and will continue to influence it into the future.

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**Appendix A**

**2004 California population by citizenship and voting status**

	Total	Latino		Non-Latino	
Total population	35,583,756	12,590,542	(35.4%)	22,993,214	(64.6%)
Citizen population	29,548,736	8,440,252	(28.6%)	21,108,484	(71.4%)
Citizen VAP	20,692,792	4,432,908	(21.4%)	16,259,885	(78.6%)
Registered Voters	14,192,951	2,455,326	(17.3%)	11,737,625	(82.7%)
Voted in 2004	12,806,694	2,081,410	(16.3%)	10,725,284	(83.7%)
Turnout / registered	90.2%	84.8%		91.3%	
Turnout / CVAP	61.9%	47.0%		66.0%	