

# THE FUTURE OF YOUNG LATINO VOTERS IN THE SOUTH

How today's Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in  
Southern states



Allie Yee  
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# THE FUTURE OF YOUNG LATINO VOTERS IN THE SOUTH

*How today's Latino youth could unlock Latino electoral power in Southern states*

In recent decades, the rapid growth of the Latino population has had a profound impact on Southern communities. It has spurred economic activity, changed the way schools educate students and sparked heated debates about immigration across the region.

As the 2016 election season heats up, attention is shifting to another key area where Latinos are reshaping the South: the Southern electorate.

Over the next two decades, the number of eligible Latino voters in the region will increase dramatically as today's Latino youth — almost all of whom are U.S. citizens — turn 18 and become eligible to vote. By 2020, over 1.6 million Latino youth in the South\* will age into the electorate. By 2024, if current trends hold, Southern states are projected to gain 3 million new Latino voters.

The aging-in of young Latino voters living in the South presents a critical opportunity to expand Latinos' electoral clout, which has not kept pace with the community's growing numbers due to the citizenship status and young age of many Latinos in the region. With numbers trending towards growing electoral power for Latinos, the question becomes whether these new voters will be engaged and motivated enough to cast ballots in the South's future elections.

## **Growing numbers of Latino youth in the South**

The Latino population in the South is a disproportionately young one. Nationally, less than a fourth of the population across all races and ethnicities is under 18. In the South, the share of Latinos who are under 18 and therefore ineligible to vote is 32 percent. More than 90 percent of those Southern Latino youth are citizens, though, meaning a significant share of the region's Latino population is on track to become eligible to vote in the coming years.

Young Latinos are already fueling the growth of the Latino electorate at the national level. Between 2012 and 2016, the Pew Research Center reported that 3.2 million young Latinos will have aged into the electorate, driving the growth of eligible Latino voters to a record 27.3 million nationwide in 2016.<sup>1</sup> According to Pew, Millennials, defined as adults born in 1981 or later, will make up 44 percent of eligible Latino voters in 2016 — by far the largest age cohort within a race or ethnicity. In comparison, Millennials make up 27 percent of eligible white voters, 30 percent of Asian voters and 35 percent of African-American voters.

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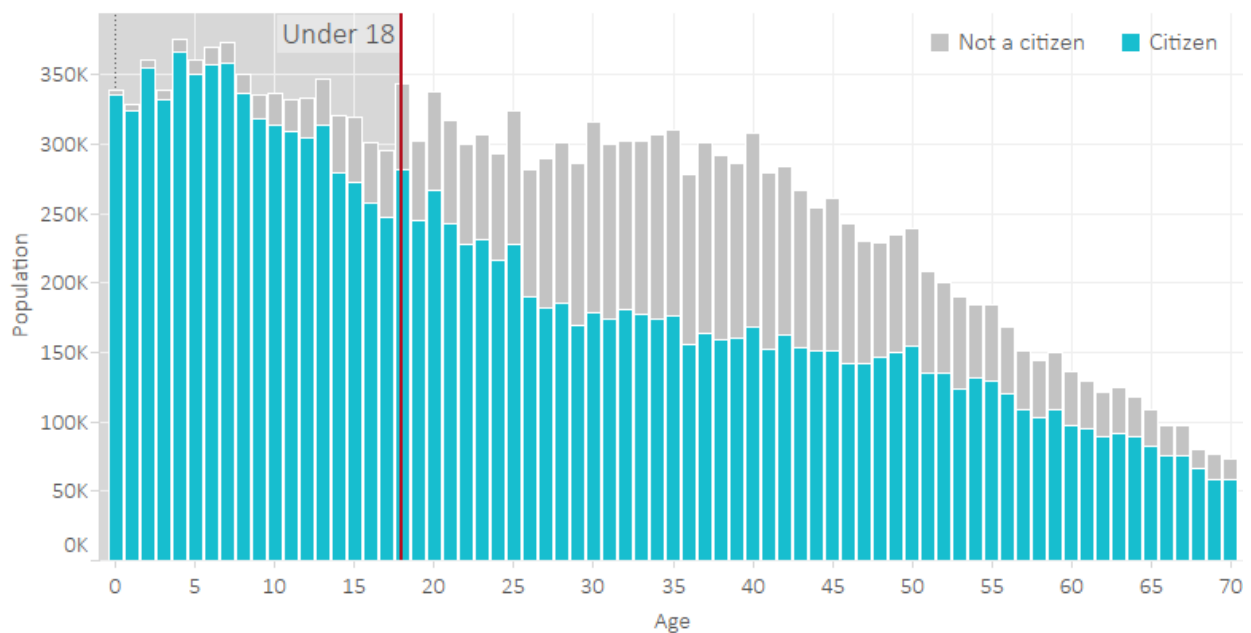
\* States included in this analysis include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. While the Institute for Southern Studies also counts West Virginia among the Southern states, it was excluded from this analysis because of the small number of Latino residents in the state.

Latino youth are also poised to reshape the South’s electorate. According to an Institute for Southern Studies analysis of U.S. Census data in 12 Southern states, there were 6.1 million Latino youth under 18 in the South in 2014. Nearly all of them — 94 percent — were U.S. citizens.

The states that were included in this analysis are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

The following chart shows the total number of Latinos in these 12 states by age and the share that are citizens.

LATINO POPULATION BY AGE AND CITIZENSHIP IN 12 SOUTHERN STATES, 2014



NOTE: Southern states included in this analysis are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.



CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates via IPUMS-USA

*See an interactive, state-by-state version of this chart at [www.southernstudies.org/YoungLatinoVoters](http://www.southernstudies.org/YoungLatinoVoters)*

## Implications for the Latino electorate

The implications of these trends are clear: As Southern Latino youth who are citizens reach eligible voting age, the size of the Latino electorate in the South will grow steadily in the coming years.

According to the Institute’s analysis of the 2014 Census data, about 500,000 Latino citizens will have reached the age of 18 between 2014 and 2016, joining the 8.7 million eligible Latino voters already in the region in 2014. The pace of growth picks up significantly in 2019, with over 300,000 young Latinos turning 18 that year and every year after.

### LATINO YOUTH IN THE SOUTH WHO WILL TURN 18 EACH YEAR

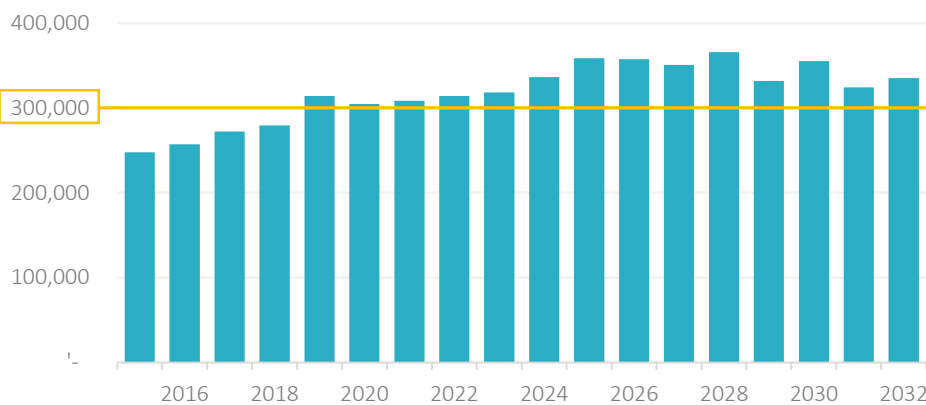


CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates via IPUMS-USA

By 2020, an estimated 1.6 million young Latinos will have turned 18 and joined the electorate. By 2024, the Institute estimates that number will jump to nearly 3 million. Looking over the longer term, more than 5.7 million Latino youth will become eligible voters by the 2032 election when Latinos who were under age 1 in 2014 will become first-time voters. Over the course of those 18 years, they will expand the overall Southern Latino eligible voter population by two-thirds.

### TOTAL LATINO YOUTH WHO WILL AGE INTO THE ELECTORATE BY FUTURE ELECTIONS

By 2016	505,000
By 2020	1,675,000
By 2024	2,953,000
By 2028	4,385,000
By 2032	5,732,000



CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates via IPUMS-USA

## Changes in key Southern states

While the number of Latinos, including young Latinos who are citizens, has risen across the South, the impact will be more pronounced in some states.

In terms of sheer numbers, the biggest growth will be in the traditional immigrant hubs of Florida and Texas. By 2020, Texas alone will add nearly a million young Latino voters, while Florida can expect 333,000 Latino youth to become voting-eligible.

In other Southern states, the recent, rapid growth of Latino communities will begin to translate into changes in the electorate in the coming years. Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee have had some of the fastest Latino growth rates in the country over the last decade. In the next 20 years, these Latino communities will become more established, and a growing number of Latinos will age into the electorate.

According to Institute projections, Latino youth are on track to double the current Latino voting-eligible population in the next two decades.

### IMPACT OF LATINO YOUTH BY STATE

State	2014 Latino voting-eligible population	Number of Latino youth aging into the electorate by 2032	Increase over 2014 level
North Carolina	248,000	320,000	129%
Tennessee	92,000	116,000	126%
Arkansas	60,000	75,000	126%
Georgia	291,000	317,000	109%
Kentucky	49,000	50,000	103%
Alabama	67,000	67,000	101%
South Carolina	88,000	86,000	98%
Mississippi	31,000	24,000	78%
Virginia	277,000	214,000	77%
Texas	4,818,000	3,318,000	69%
SOUTH TOTAL	8,674,000	5,732,000	66%
Louisiana	99,000	69,000	60%
Florida	2,557,000	1,088,000	43%



CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates via IPUMS-USA

## Electoral under-representation of Latinos in the South

These estimates underscore a significant trend that could elevate the voice of a community that has, despite rapid growth in the region, been under-represented at the polls. Due to the age structure and citizenship rates of Latinos in the South, only 45 percent of the community was eligible to vote in 2014, compared to 71 percent of the U.S. population across all races and ethnicities. Excluding Florida and Texas, which have more established Latino immigrant communities, the share of Southern Latinos who are eligible to vote drops even further, to 33 percent.

### THE VOTER ELIGIBILITY GAP AMONG SOUTHERN LATINOS

	U.S. overall	Latinos in the South	Latinos in the South excluding Florida and Texas
Percent of population under 18	23	32	36
Percent of adults who are citizens	92	67	51
Percent of population eligible to vote	71	45	33



CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates via IPUMS-USA

While across the region less than half of Latinos have a voice at the ballot box, the share of Latinos who are eligible to vote is even smaller in many Southern states. As shown below, in North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas and Georgia, fewer than one in three Latino residents are eligible to vote.

### SHARE OF LATINO RESIDENTS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE

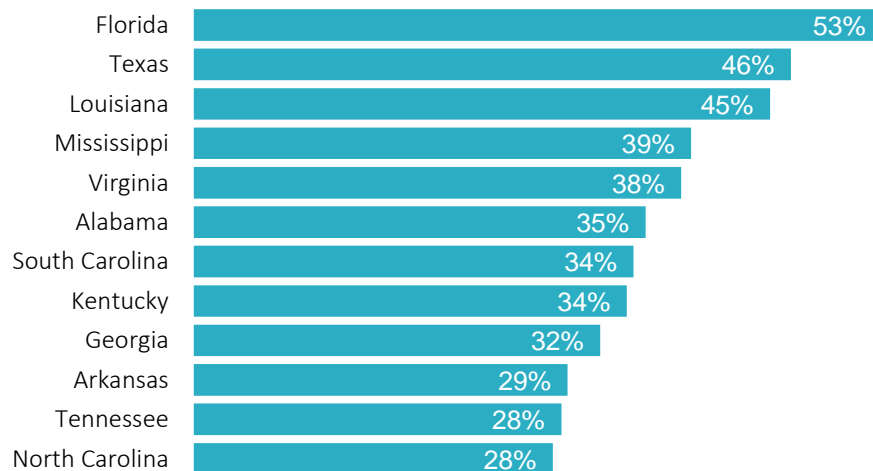


CHART: Allie Yee, February 2016

SOURCE: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2014 American Community Survey

## Engagement will be critical

The influx of young Latinos into the South's electorate over the coming years presents an opportunity for the Latino community to amplify its voice and have greater sway in Southern politics. But the electoral impact of these new young voters hinges on whether they can be mobilized to show up at the polls on Election Day.

Given historical voting trends among Latinos and Millennials, turnout could be a major challenge. According to the recent Pew report on Latino Millennial voters, fewer than half of all eligible Latino voters voted in 2012. By comparison, turnout among whites was 64 percent and among African Americans was 67 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Voting rates among young people have also been historically low compared to older generations. Nationally, 45 percent of voters ages 18 to 29 cast a ballot in 2012, compared to 72 percent among people 65 and older and 68 percent among people ages 45 to 64.<sup>3</sup> Among Millennials nationally, young Latinos had even lower turnout rates than young people of other races. Pew found that in 2012 only 38 percent of Latino Millennials turned out to vote, compared to 48 percent among white Millennials and 55 percent among black Millennials.

The turnout gap may in part be an issue of outreach and engagement. In 2012, a Latino Decisions/impreMedia poll found that only 31 percent of Latinos across the country were contacted before the election regarding voting or registering to vote.<sup>4</sup> These outreach efforts could make a significant difference, as research has found that Latinos are almost twice as likely as whites to register to vote through voter registration drives.<sup>5</sup>

With 5.7 million Latino youth aging into the Southern electorate over the coming two decades, outreach and engagement to these potential voters will be critical to ensure that this rapidly growing segment of Southern communities has a greater voice in local, state and national affairs.



## End Notes

1. “Millennials Make Up Almost Half of Latino Eligible Voters in 2016,” Pew Research Center, January 19, 2016. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/01/19/millennials-make-up-almost-half-of-latino-eligible-voters-in-2016/>
2. “Millennials Make Up Almost Half of Latino Eligible Voters in 2016,” Pew Research Center, January 19, 2016. <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/01/19/millennials-make-up-almost-half-of-latino-eligible-voters-in-2016/s>
3. “The Youth Vote in 2012,” The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University. [http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CIRCLE\\_2013FS\\_outhVoting2012FINAL.pdf](http://civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CIRCLE_2013FS_outhVoting2012FINAL.pdf)
4. “2012 Latino Election Eve Poll,” Matt Barreto and Gary Segura, impreMedia and Latino Decisions, November 7, 2012. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/2012-election-eve-polls/>
5. “State Restrictions on Voter Registration Drives,” Diana Kasdan, Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, November 30, 2012. <http://www.brennancenter.org/publication/state-restrictions-voter-registration-drives>

## Methodology

Age and citizenship data were drawn from 2014 American Community Survey 1-year estimates accessed through the University of Minnesota’s IPUMS-USA ([www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)). The data was focused on populations whose ethnicity is coded by the Census Bureau as “Hispanic.” This report referred to this population as Latino.

The 12 Southern states included in this analysis were: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. The Institute for Southern Studies also considers West Virginia to be part of the South, but did not include it because the state has such a small Latino population.

## Acknowledgments

The Institute for Southern Studies appreciates the help of Rebecca Tippet of Carolina Demography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill’s Carolina Population Center, who previously developed this analysis for North Carolina’s Latino population (see “North Carolina Hispanics and the Electorate” at <http://demography.cpc.unc.edu/>) and provided assistance with this project.