



# Latino Politics: A Growing and Evolving Political Community (A Reference Guide)

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Latino Politics:  
A Growing and Evolving  
Political Community  
(A Reference Guide)

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# Table of Contents

## **Preface: Moving from LNPS '89 to the LNS '06 – Major Latino Political Science Surveys**

<a href="#">An Initial Inquiry</a>	8
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## **Latino Politics: Both a Growing and Evolving Political Community (Retrospective Essay)**

<a href="#">Who Are They and Where Are They Going?</a>	10
<a href="#">Pan-Ethnicity and Community</a>	11
<a href="#">Group Identification and Public Life</a>	12
<a href="#">Assimilation and Acculturation</a>	12
<a href="#">What do Latinos Want? - Opinions and Policies</a>	13
<a href="#">Organizations, Mobilization, and Representation</a>	13
<a href="#">Foreign-born Latinos and Politics</a>	15
<a href="#">Context Matters for Latinos</a>	16
<a href="#">Future Latino Research and Challenges</a>	16

## **Chapter Two: Methodology and User Guide**

<a href="#">Selection and Organization of Relevant Conceptual Categories</a>	19
<a href="#">Data Collection</a>	22
<a href="#">Using this Bibliography Effectively</a>	23

## **Chapter Three: History, Demographics, and Mass Media**

<a href="#">Latino History - Books</a>	24
<a href="#">Latino History - Articles</a>	42
<a href="#">Latino Demographics and SES Trends - Books</a>	43
<a href="#">Latino Demographics and SES Trends - Articles</a>	45
<a href="#">Latinos in the Discipline - Books</a>	50
<a href="#">Latinos in the Discipline - Articles</a>	50
<a href="#">Latinos in the Mass Media – Books</a>	52
<a href="#">Latinos in the Mass Media – Articles</a>	58

## **Chapter Four: Latino Identity**

<a href="#">General Identity - Books</a>	59
<a href="#">General Identity - Articles</a>	80
<a href="#">Pan-Ethnic Identity - Articles</a>	86
<a href="#">National Origin Based Identity - Articles</a>	89
<a href="#">Racial Identity - Articles</a>	95
<a href="#">Discrimination and Identity - Articles</a>	100

## **Chapter Five: Books Focused on Ethnic Studies**

<a href="#">Central American Studies</a>	104
<a href="#">Cuban American Studies</a>	105
<a href="#">Dominican American Studies</a>	106
<a href="#">Mexican American Studies</a>	108
<a href="#">Chicana Studies</a>	112
<a href="#">Chicano Studies</a>	115
<a href="#">Puerto Rican Studies</a>	121

## **Chapter Six: Political Attitudes and Political Behavior**

<a href="#">Political Attitudes and Political Behavior - Books</a>	126
<a href="#">Political Attitudes and Public Opinion - Articles</a>	128
<a href="#">Partisanship and Party Identification - Articles</a>	147
<a href="#">Political Participation - Articles</a>	151

## **Chapter Seven: Latino Elites, Representation, and Institutions**

<a href="#">Latino Elites, Representation, and Institutions - Books</a>	172
<a href="#">Latino Elites, Representation, and Institutions - Articles</a>	186

## **Chapter Eight: Inter-group Relations**

<a href="#">General Inter-Group Relations - Books</a>	193
<a href="#">Inter-Group Attitudes - Articles</a>	194
<a href="#">Coalition Formation and Conflict - Books</a>	197
<a href="#">Coalition Formation and Conflict - Articles</a>	200

## Chapter Nine: Public Policy Issues

<a href="#">Economic and Labor Policy-Books</a>	202
<a href="#">Economic and Labor Policy-Articles</a>	207
<a href="#">Education - Books</a>	210
<a href="#">Education - Articles</a>	222
<a href="#">Health Care/Health Policy - Books</a>	235
<a href="#">Health Care/Health Policy - Articles</a>	235
<a href="#">Housing / Segregation - Books</a>	238
<a href="#">Housing / Segregation - Articles</a>	238
<a href="#">Immigration and Naturalization - Books</a>	243
<a href="#">Immigration and Naturalization - Articles</a>	260
<a href="#">Language Policy - Books</a>	288
<a href="#">Language Policy - Articles</a>	288
<a href="#">The Criminal Justice System/Criminology - Books</a>	291
<a href="#">The Criminal Justice System/Criminology - Articles</a>	293
<a href="#">General Policy Research - Books</a>	296
<a href="#">General Policy Research - Articles</a>	297

## Chapter Ten: Methodology and Measurement Issues

<a href="#">Methodology and Measurement Issues - Books</a>	301
<a href="#">Methodology and Measurement Issues - Articles</a>	301

## Chapter Eleven: Reference Sources

<a href="#">Bibliographies</a>	307
<a href="#">Biographies and Biographical References</a>	308
<a href="#">Dictionaries and Encyclopedias</a>	309
<a href="#">Handbooks, Statistical Abstracts, Etc.</a>	310

**Appendix A: Categories**                      **312**

**Appendix B: Book Publishers**            **313**

**Appendix C: Scholarly Journals and Research Centers**                      **316**

## Preface: Moving from LNPS '89 to the LNS '06 – Major Latino Political Science Surveys

Latinos or Hispanics now constitute the largest “minority” ethnic/racial group in the United States, and are forecast to be the primary catalyst for this nation’s population growth for the foreseeable future. If current trends continue, conservative projections are that Latinos may be 25 percent of the U.S. population by 2050 and 33 percent by 2100. The recent growth of this population presents unique challenges to American society, and especially to the nation’s capacity to successfully accommodate the needs and interests of Latinos as governmental institutions are called upon to educate, provide health care, employ, and politically incorporate this group.

Less obvious, perhaps, are the challenges confronting Latinos themselves, who must define their own communities, as well as their roles and responsibilities as an increasingly integral members of the larger American polity. What it means to be Latino, and how Latinos relate to the rest of American society, varies across geographic location, reflecting differences in the size, national origin mix, and time of arrival of local Latino populations as well as differences in the social, political and institutional contexts in which they reside. Each of these differences alters the experience of “being Latino,” even as the presence of Latinos alters the society in which they live

If in earlier generations, single-national origin groups living in geographically and linguistically isolated and concentrated enclaves—in the Southwest, South Florida, or New York—predominantly characterized the Latino experience, but that is no longer the case. New narratives of Latino populations mixed by generation, language dominance, and national origin, to say nothing of Latinos living in areas like the rural South and Midwest, are creating new complexities to the Latino experience in America. It is to these new “common” experiences of Latinos that we identify and document the systematic research done on the growing and evolving Latino community in America. The volume of research and the examination of the complexities associated Latino civic and political life reflect the development of this maturing field of inquiry. It is the purpose of this collection to chronicle these developments and facilitate active and curious “students” of Latino political life and broader exposure to this literature.

### An Initial Inquiry

In the summer of 1984, a group of four Latino political scientists flew to New York City to meet with officers of the Lou Harris survey firm. Their purpose was to explore the possibility of augmenting their 1984 Presidential election panel that was tracking public opinion and voters’ preferences with a reasonable number of Latino respondents. Even at that time, there was a perspective that this growing population would be playing an increasing, important role in electoral politics. During the course of this conversation, it became abundantly clear to this research group that an expanded sample would not be sufficient to explore the breadth and depth of this emerging community.

Over the next four plus years, this group was involved in a research study group to identify major conceptual and analytical issues and themes necessary to incorporate in any systematic study of Latinos. Eventually, planning funds from the Ford Foundation were appropriated to explore sampling issues related to the Latino population, inventory and assessment of the extant research literature on Latinos, and development of a survey instrument on Latino political life. The most visible product of that endeavor was the completion of the Latino National Political Survey, 1989-1990. At the same time, that search for the extant research literature also produced a reference book- Latinos and Politics: A Select Research



## *An Initial Inquiry*

Bibliography published by the University of Texas Press.

Now, almost twenty years later, an almost new set of Latino Political Science researchers embarked on a similar process as the Latino National Survey (LNS) group. In 2003, a small group talked among themselves about the long gap since a major social science survey of Latinos. The concern was not only based on datedness of information, but that many demographic changes that had occurred. These changes has included incredible population growth, rise of the diversity of Latino sub-groups (i.e. Central and South Americans and Dominicans), even larger segment of Latino immigrants than before, geographic dispersion nationally, and greater national awareness and issues around this group. In addition, political developments had resulted in the growth of national advocacy organizations, increased numbers of elected officials at all levels of government, gains economically as entrepreneurs, consumers, and members of organized labor.

So over the next three years, funding was secured for planning and designing a major social science survey through the Hewlett Foundation. The planning phase re-examined important sampling issues and approaches, use of focus groups to explore the more salient issues and ways to develop survey items, and update the extant research literature. It is the latter charge that served as the basis for this book project. The Latino National Survey is the noteworthy product of this past effort as 8634 Latinos were interviewed in 2005-2006 in seventeen states and the District of Colombia. At the same time, the knowledge base of smaller scaled surveys and published research since 1990 was the foundation that guided the LNS project.