

# “I’M LATINA AND I VOTE”

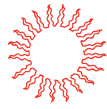
## **An Examination Of Latina Political Participation In Colorado**

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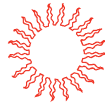
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Latina Initiative



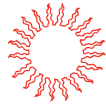


**WHILE** the population of Latinas constitutes a significant and growing portion of the state of Colorado, their political potential has yet to be fully realized. Significant historic and contemporary barriers such as age and citizenship requirements as well as income and education help to explain their lower levels of electoral engagement. Despite their marginalization from traditional channels of electoral politics, Latinas share a long history of participation in non-traditional political spheres including mutual aid societies, labor unions, church related organizations, and social movements in the state. This paper examines the history of Latina political participation in Colorado, focusing particular attention on the contemporary patterns of voting and registration among Latinas/os. The paper examines both the trends in voting behavior among Latinas/os locally and nationally, as well as the key obstacles that continue to restrict their electoral engagement. In the end, the paper examines the work of the Latina Initiative in Denver, Colorado, and their efforts to mobilize Latinas using a community centered participation model attentive to the historic and contemporary obstacles experienced by Latinas and Latinos.



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## INTRODUCTION: THE STATE OF LATINAS AND LATINOS IN COLORADO

According to recent Census reports, the current population of Latinas/os in Colorado is estimated at 934,413 persons or approximately 20% of the total state population (US Census Bureau 2007).<sup>1</sup> Within this, Latinas make up just under half of the total Latino community, or approximately 9% of the total state population (US Census Bureau 2006). The figures represent both an 8% increase in the population since the 2000 census and a 45% increase from the 1990 census (US Census Bureau 2006, Guzman 2001). In addition, they reflect the status of Latinas and Latinos as the fastest growing ethnic minority population in the state (US Census Bureau 2007). This rate of growth among Latinas/os is consistent with national patterns. In 2007 the Latina/o population in the U.S. was estimated at over 44 million persons, constituting 14.8% of the total U.S. population (American Community Survey 2006, U.S. Census Bureau 2007).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in 2000 Latinas/os reached a demographic milestone surpassing African Americans in becoming the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S (Grieco and Cassidy 2001). Overall, the population of Latinas/os

**Table 1**  
**The Latina/o Population in the United States and Colorado, 1990 and 2007**

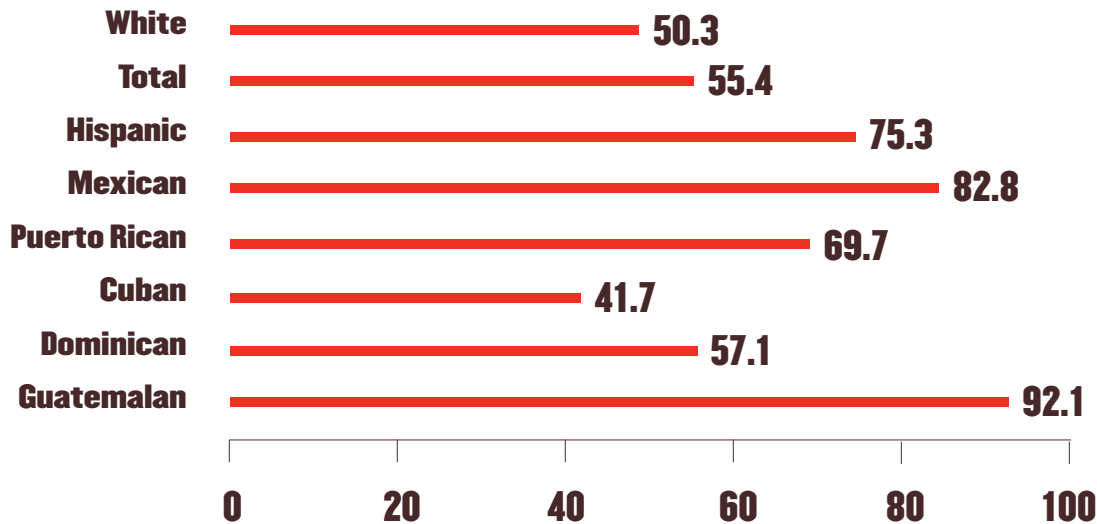
	1990			2007		
	Total	Latina/o	% Latina/o	Total	Latina/o	% Latina/o
 <b>United States</b>	249,439,545	22,574,761	<b>9.1%</b>	299,398,484	44,321,038	<b>14.8%</b>
 <b>Colorado</b>	3,303,919	425,378	<b>12.9%</b>	4,753,377	934,413	<b>19.7%</b>

Source: Betsy Guzman, *The Hispanic Population: Census 2000 Brief*. C2KBR/01-3. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. Table 2. *Estimates of the Population by Race Alone or in Combination and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States and States.*

<sup>1</sup> The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are used interchangeably by the federal government. Within U.S. Census records, the population is defined to include any person of “Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (American Community Survey Reports 2007). Moreover, as reported in the US Census records, they reflect “self-identification by individuals according to the group or groups with which they most closely identify” as opposed to designation by the survey collector (American Community Survey 2006, American Community Survey Reports, 2007).

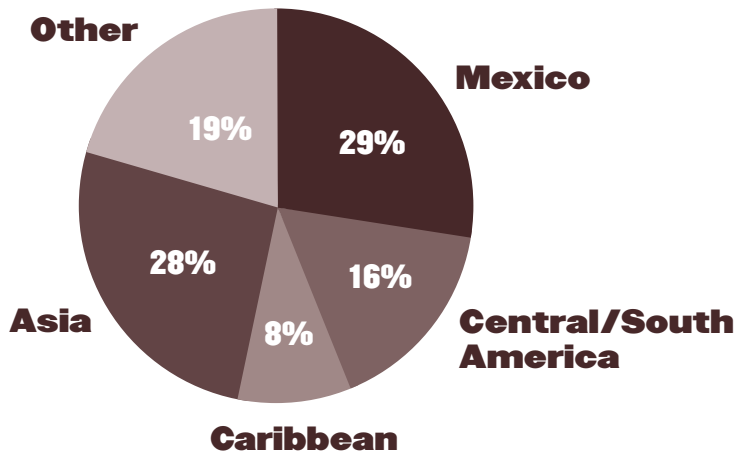
<sup>2</sup> Among Latinas/os in the U.S., the largest segment of the population is made up of Mexican/Mexican Americans who comprise 64% of all Latinas/os in the country, followed by Puerto Ricans (9.5%), Central Americans (7%), South Americans (5.5%), Cubans (3.5%), and Dominicans (2.5%) (American Community Survey 2006). This breakdown parallels the composition of Latinas/as in Colorado with the largest segment comprised of Mexican Americans followed by Puerto Ricans, Central and South Americans and Cubans.

**Graph 1**  
**Fertility Rates Among U.S. Latinas, 2004: Births Per 1000 Women**



Source: American Community Survey Reports, 2007. *The American Community-Hispanics: 2004*. U.S. Census Bureau; U.S. Department of Commerce.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004. American Community Survey. Selected Population Profiles, S0201.

**Graph 2**  
**Legal Female Migration to the U.S. by Region of Origin, 2004**



Source: Richard Fry. 2006 Appendix A6: Characteristics of Recent Arrivals, *Gender and Migration*. Washington D.C. : Pew Hispanic Center.

in Colorado is both sizable and growing – a trend represented by Colorado’s ranking among the top-ten states with the largest Latina/o communities in the country (US Census Bureau 2004).

Two factors in particular contribute significantly to the growth of Latinas/os in the U.S.: a steady flow of immigrants from Latin America, and a strong fertility rate among Latinas/os already in the U.S. Often overlooked in these demographics is the centrality of Latinas to both these shifts. That is, in 2004 women from Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean constituted 53% of all legal adult migrants to the U.S. (Fry 2006). Among these Latin American immigrants, Latinas outnumbered Latinos, 52% to 48% respectively (Fry 2006). This concentration of female immigrants has contributed to the “feminization” of immigration (Fry 2006).<sup>3</sup> In addition, Latinas possess a higher fertility rate than non-Hispanic whites, with Guatemalan women and Mexican women reporting some of the highest levels of fertility in the country (American Community Survey 2006). In short, Latinas lie at the heart of these expanding communities, literally bringing forth a new generation of Latinas/os in the country.

Despite the centrality of Latinas to the growth of these communities in the U.S. and Colorado, their political voice is often unheard. That is, the levels at which Latinas participate in traditional electoral politics, either as voters or as candidates seeking political office, regularly falls below their population numbers. For example, in the 1995 Participation in America II study conducted by Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, and Henry Brady, when comparing electoral activity across ethnic and gender groups, Latinas consistently ranked at the bottom in terms of their level of political activity. They demonstrated consistently lower patterns of participation in voting, campaign work, campaign contributions, and contact with public officials, than Anglo males and females, African American males and females, and Latino males (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

In addition, few Latinas participate in formal political organizations such as political parties and caucuses, and Latinas are among the segments of the population least likely to be recruited for political action and run for elective office (Garcia 2004, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). In fact, while Latino men have run successful elections for national office since 1877, it was only in the past 20 years that Latinas have successfully broken this barrier and won election to Congress (Garcia 2004).<sup>4</sup> A parallel, albeit slightly less dramatic pattern exists among the Latina/o communities of Denver and Colorado. That is, while the first Latino male was elected to the Denver city council in 1943 and men sat in the state Senate and House of Representatives in the 1960s, Latinas didn’t join the legislature until the 1970s (Leonard and Noel 1990, Lopez 1959).

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<sup>3</sup> To clarify, while Latinas currently constitute a larger portion of all adult legal immigrants, the Pew Hispanic Center reports that since 1995 the annual arrival of unauthorized immigrants has exceeded that of legal immigrants (Passel 2006). Among the population of adult unauthorized immigrants, Latino men outnumber Latinas (Fry 2006).

<sup>4</sup> The first Latina to successfully run for Congress was Cuban-American Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican from Florida, who won election in the 18th Congressional seat in 1988 (Garcia 2004).

**Table 2**  
**Political Participation Among Anglos, African Americans**  
**and Latinas/os by Sex (%)**

<b>POLITICAL ACTIVITY</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Anglo Males</b>	<b>Anglo Females</b>	<b>Black Males</b>	<b>Black Females</b>	<b>Latino Males</b>	<b>Latinas</b>
<b>VOTING</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>CAMPAIGN WORK</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CONTACT WITH OFFICIAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9</b>

Source: John A. Garcia, *Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture, and Interests*. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) tab. 6.3, p. 98; S. Verba, K. Scholman, and H. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) tab 8.5, p. 258.

This is not to say that Latinas are disinterested in politics, in fact there is a rich history of Latina participation in non-electoral politics across the Southwest. Rather, there are a number of formal and informal barriers that have frequently prevented Latinas from participating in traditional electoral politics or from transitioning from non-traditional to traditional forms of political participation.

Of significance to this study is the role of community based organizations such as the Latina Initiative in Colorado, to improving the participation of Latinas in traditional electoral politics and in doing so strengthening the political voice of the entire Latina/o community. Moreover, to properly understand the current gaps in Latina political participation and the success of mobilization efforts such as that of Latina Initiative, a longer view of the trends, patterns and obstacles to participation among Latinas is necessary.

Therefore, in the following study I examine the political history of Latinas in Colorado, beginning with a brief overview of their participation in the early part of the 20th century, focusing particular attention on their participation in non-traditional forms of politics such as mutual aid societies. I then look at the patterns of registration and voting among Latinas in the years following political change in the 1970s (and particularly with the federal protections provided by the Voting Rights Act). In the end, I examine more closely the practices of the Latina Initiative as a case study in the development of successful mobilization strategies aimed at addressing the historic obstacles and contemporary interests of Latinas in Colorado.



## POLITICAL HISTORY OF LATINAS IN COLORADO: 1900-1975

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, *de jure* and *de facto* forms of discrimination served to negatively impact the political participation of both women and racial minorities.<sup>5</sup> Much like African American women, Latinas experienced the dual impacts of both racial and gendered forms of exclusion, keeping them from the ballot box and elective office until late in the century. However, these barriers to political participation did not prevent Latinas from taking part in issues that impacted their communities and their families and cultivating a political voice. For much of the twentieth century, Latinas in Colorado, as in the rest of the country, expressed their political interests in community organizations, church groups, and other non-traditional political organizations that lie outside the formal channels of electoral politics. The first Latinas in Colorado were descendants of families whose lineage could be traced to early Spanish colonial settlements or to indigenous communities in the Southwest and whose presence predated the constitution of the state (Castañeda 1993). They were among the estimated 100,000 Mexicans living in the Southwestern territory which belonged to Mexico but was ceded to the U.S. at the end of U.S-Mexico war (Acuña 2000). However, the first sizeable Latina/o communities in the state didn't emerge until the early 20th century, and were concentrated in the southeastern part of Colorado (particularly Las Animas and Huerfano counties) where approximately 25,000 Mexicans (out of a total Mexican population of 35,000) lived (Acuña 2000). This early wave of Mexican migrants came both from northern Mexico as well as New Mexico, and were pulled to the state primarily by the expanded employment opportunities in the sugar beet industry, in transportation, in mining and in the Pueblo steel mill.

Colorado refined one-fourth of all sugar processed in the United States. Since 1905, Russian-Germans had done the manual labor associated with sugar-beet production, but World War I cut off this supply. The 1921 and 1924 Immigration acts further affected the supply of sugar beet workers, and employment agents recruited Mexicans to do this backbreaking work. Railroads also hired Mexicans, an estimated 5,000 worked on the maintenance crews, within the state. Mines and industries requiring cheap labor also hired Mexicans. Mexicans often lived isolated in small lonely clusters of two to eight families. For [Mexican] women in Colorado the loss of the family network they had enjoyed in New Mexico, no matter how poor they were, produced a life of isolation and loneliness (Acuña, pg. 204-205, 2000).

The geographic and cultural isolation these women experienced, coupled with language barriers, literacy tests, and open intimidation from white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, served to restrict them from the traditional avenues of politics (Acuña 2000, Leonard and Noel 1990). In fact, these barriers kept both Mexican men and women marginalized from electoral channels.

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<sup>5</sup> As a reminder, while all native born or naturalized men, with the exclusion of American Indians and those ineligible for citizenship, were enfranchised with the ratification of the 14th amendment in 1868, sex based barriers to voting were not removed from the constitution until more than 50 years later with the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920 (Flexner and Fitzpatrick 1996, Leonard and Noel 1990). However, Colorado presented a unique opportunity for suffragettes becoming the first state in the country to grant women the right to vote in 1893 (Leonard and Noel 1990, Stetson 1997). In fact, as Stephen Leonard and Tom Noel note, "until California sanctioned equal suffrage in 1911, thereby enfranchising women in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Denver was the largest city in the nation where women could vote" (p.100, 1990). Yet, even with these barriers to *de jure* discrimination lifted, it would take years (and a civil rights movement) to address the *de facto* traditions, norms and customs which continued to keep racial minorities and particularly women of color from the polling booths.

In response, many Mexican communities formed their own mutual aid societies or “mutualistas” often with the aid and support of the Mexican consul (Acuña 2000, Velez-Ibañez 1996). The mutualistas provided a source of networking, financial support, and organization for Mexican communities throughout the Southwest and the Midwest, while maintaining connections between these immigrants and their hometowns. As in other parts of the Southwest, mutualistas proliferated in Mexican immigrants communities in Colorado with groups such as *La Sociedad de Obreros Libres* (Free Workers Society) of Gilcrest, Colorado and the *Alianza Hispano-Americana* (Hispanic-American Alliance) in Brighton, Colorado (Acuña 2000).

Isolated from the formal channels of politics and excluded from political parties and most major labor unions, Mexican women played a significant role in the mutualistas. Moreover, Mexican-American women, such as Luisa M. De Gonzalez in San Antonio, Texas even headed mutual aid societies, cultivating their political voice while honing skills as leaders and organizers (Acuña 2000).<sup>6</sup> Over the proceeding decades, Mexican American women in Colorado along with the other populations of Latin American women that migrated to the state would use the lessons learned in these small community centered organizations to gain a political foothold in larger groups such as church organizations and labor unions (Calderón and Zamora 1990). They would continue to develop their political voice through participation in key events impacting Latina/o laborers such as the Colorado Coal Strike, and the organization of Pueblo steel workers (Vallejo 1998).

Arguably, the most significant political shift in the lives of Latinas in Colorado, and in the country during the 20th century, came with the onset of social protest movements in the 60s and 70s designed to address the continuing legacy of racial exclusion. In Colorado, Chicanas and Latinas were prominent figures in these movements – from organizing student walkouts, to their participation in the Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in 1969 in Denver (García 1990).

It was within the context of these social movements that Chicana feminists of the late 1960s began to form their own support networks and call for their own political space. Notable among these efforts was the formation of journals and community newspapers such as *Regeneración*, *Encuentro Femenil*, and *Las Hijas de Cuahtemoc*, all of which regularly published work by and about Chicana feminists (García 1997). While these outlets survived only a few years, they provided an important precedent by documenting the history

of Chicanas and Latinas in the U.S., and by providing a means for their political expression. In addition to these efforts, Chicana feminists also struggled to have their voices heard in the larger channels of communication among Chicano political activists. Chicana feminist writings appeared in periodicals such as *Aztlán*, *El Magazin de Tejas*, *La Raza*, *Consafos*, *De Colores*, and *La Luz* which were distributed across the Southwest. Chicana feminists Enriqueta Longeaux y Vasquez and Elizabeth Martinez edited one of the largest movement newspapers, *El Grito del Norte*, from 1968 to 1973 (García 1997).

By the early 1980s, Chicana feminists also began to organize regional and national conferences which brought together academics and activists. In 1983 these efforts were consolidated with the formation of the Chicana caucus of the National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS) and the creation of MALCS (Mujeres Activa en Letras y Cambios Sociales), two organizations dedicated to analyzing power relations within the Chicana/o community at large. The creation of these organizations was followed in 1984 by the first NACS conference (“Voces de la Mujer”) dedicated exclusively to examinations of gender and the inauguration of the annual Chicana/Latina summer research institute by MALCS in 1985.

The inequalities exposed in the course of these social movements also led to the passage of significant federal legislation which altered the future of Latina/o political participation, most notably the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the expansion of the Voting Rights Act in 1975 to include language minorities. Specifically, the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations on the basis of race, religion, and national origin, giving Spanish language minorities leverage to combat these restrictions. Moreover, the 1975 Voting Rights Act, which amended the 1965 Voting Rights Act, required registration forms, ballots, and other election materials be provided in a language other than English if more than 5% of the voters in an election district spoke the same non-English language (Schmidt 2000).<sup>7</sup> These laws provided federal scrutiny to a history of *de facto* discrimination that had excluded Latinas and Latinos, and by virtue of their passage new opportunities were opened up for Latinas/os to register, vote, and successfully run for public office.

Equally important to our understanding of Latina politics was the fact that these laws mandated the collection of information on voting patterns among Latinas and

<sup>6</sup> Americanization programs, designed to “assimilate” Mexican immigrants by stripping them of their cultural identity and substituting English language, customs and Protestant traditions, also proliferated in the first half of the twentieth century. These programs sponsored largely by schools, church groups, and community associations explicated targeted Mexican women, with a range of classes from home economics, English language, and interior design to typing and stenography. The assumption implicit in these programs were that women served as the cultural glue amongst Mexican families and if they could be re-adjusted toward an American lifestyle (predicated on the Anglo-Saxon model of immigration and identity), then they would become acceptable as part of the mainstream. In light of the racist themes that dominated these programs, it is surprising to find that among many working class Mexican women these programs opened up new opportunities for work (Ruiz 1993, Sanchez 1990).

<sup>7</sup> The 1975 amendments (and the VRA) were subsequently expanded, revised, and ultimately re-authorized over the next three decades. One of the more notable revisions made in 1992 expanded the protections to encompass jurisdictions (mostly counties) with ten thousand or more citizens of voting age who “are members of a single language minority and are limited English proficient” (Schmidt 2000).

Latinos, enabling a more sophisticated analysis of their participation and exclusion from the formal political process. Prior to their passage information on this population was collected under dubious categories such as “Spanish speaking” or “Spanish surname,” both excluding a significant portion of the population and including persons that did not share the same cultural or political history. In effect, passage of the 1975 Voting Rights Act, and subsequent reauthorizations, also enabled the expansion of a Latina/o political science.

Researchers constructed new data sets that more fully represented the Latino population, compensating for the deficiencies of many traditional data sets enabling them to study the values, patterns of participation, and representation of an expanded Latino presence in many areas of American politics (Fraga, Garcia, Hero, Jones-Correa, Martinez-Ebers, and Segura, pg. 515, 2006).



## CONTEMPORARY LATINA POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: 1975 -2006

The cumulative effect of these social movements and the passage of key legislation such as the Voting Rights Act was felt in a galvanized Latina/o population. However, when we examine the patterns of registration and voting among Latinas/os at the national and state level since these social movements, it appears as if the political enthusiasm did not automatically translate into strong participation in formal channels of electoral politics.

One explanation for this gap was the absence of organizations, programs, and mobilizations drives targeted at Latinas/os that would have enabled the population to surmount resource deficiencies and access this right (Garcia 2000). In other words, Latinas/os were energized by virtue of the social movements, and at least some of the structural barriers to their full participation in the voting process were remedied; however, there was not adequate knowledge of how this system of politics worked or the means to be able to access the system to see the push for voting come to fruition. Missing from this period was large-scale voter education and mobilization campaigns that would transition Latina/o political participation from the non-traditional spheres to the arena of electoral politics. While the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SWVREP) had just formed in 1974 and was engaging in some of these efforts, alone it was not sufficient to significantly impact the registration and voting behavior of the Latina/o population (Fraga, et al, 2006).

Thus, an examination of the registration and voting among the population of Latinas/os 18 years of age and older in the past three decades suggests a pattern of stagnation and gradual decline. Namely, the percentage of Latinas/os who registered to vote at the national level has gone from a high of 44.4% of the voting age population in 1972 to a low of 34.9% of the adult population in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau 2005, Garcia 2004). Similarly, at the state level the percentage of adult age Latinas/os in Colorado who have registered to vote has gone from a high of 66.5% in 1992 to a low of 35.6% in 2004.<sup>8</sup> (See Tables 3 and 4)

A parallel pattern emerges in the data on those who actually voted (after registration) at the national and state levels. Namely, the percentage of adult age Latinas/os who voted during Presidential elections over the past thirty years has gone from a high of 37.5% in 1972 to a low of 26.7% in 1996. At the state level the voting pattern among

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<sup>8</sup> Passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act facilitated the collection of data on electoral participation by mandating the federal reporting of registration and voting data for presidential and congressional elections by race, Hispanic origin, and gender. A parallel mandate does not exist in the state of Colorado, making the collection of reliable voting behavior data on the basis of race and Hispanic origin much more difficult. The U.S. Census Bureau collects the most reliable estimates as part of the Current Population Surveys, and more recently as part of the American Community Surveys. However, this data on registration and voting by race and Hispanic origin at the state level only extends in Colorado back to 1986, making comparisons to the federal level more difficult.

**Table 3**  
**Reported Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: U.S.**  
**Presidential Elections, 1986–2004 (%)**

	'04	'02	'00	'98	'96	'94	'92	'90	'88	'86
<b>OVERALL REGISTERED</b>	65.9	69.5	65.9	68.2	66.6	68.3	66.9	66.7	72.3	74.3
<b>RACE</b>										
<b>White</b>	73.5	71.6	67.7	70.1	67.9	69.6	68.4	68.3	73.4	75.4
<b>Black</b>	64.4	67.5	63.5	63.9	64.5	66.3	60.0	58.5	65.5	66.2
<b>Hispanic Origin</b>	34.3	34.9	35.7	35.0	35.5	40.1	36.3	37.8	44.4	N/A
<b>SEX</b>										
<b>Male</b>	64.0	68.0	64.4	66.9	65.2	67.3	66.6	67.1	73.1	76.0
<b>Female</b>	67.6	70.9	67.3	69.3	67.8	69.3	67.1	66.4	71.6	72.4

Source: Current Population Report Series P20, nos. 192, 253, 322, 370,405,440,466,542; November 1996 Current Population Survey; John A. Garcia, *Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture, and Interests*, (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) tab 7.1, p. 118.; U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. *Current Population Survey, Table A-6 Reported Voting and Registration for Total and Citizen Voting Age-age Population: Presidential Elections 1980-2004*. U.S. Department of Commerce.

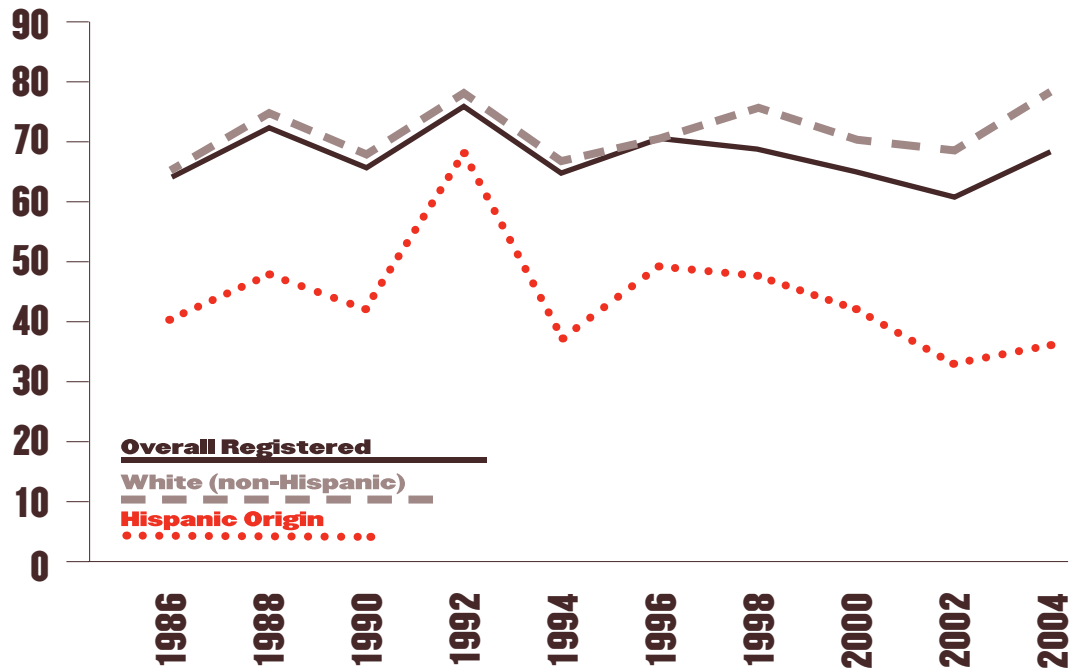
**Table 4**  
**Reported Registration by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex**  
**in Colorado, Among Voting Age Population, 1986–2004 (%)**

	'04	'02	'00	'98	'96	'94	'92	'90	'88	'86
<b>OVERALL REGISTERED</b>	61.9	60.9 <sup>†</sup>	64.1 <sup>†</sup>	68.5 <sup>†</sup>	70.0 <sup>†</sup>	64.5 <sup>†</sup>	74.7 <sup>†</sup>	65.4 <sup>†</sup>	73.0 <sup>†</sup>	65.0 <sup>†</sup>
<b>RACE</b>										
<b>White</b>	77.2	68.9 <sup>†</sup>	70.1 <sup>†</sup>	74.3 <sup>†</sup>	71.1 <sup>†</sup>	66.7 <sup>†</sup>	77.2 <sup>†</sup>	67.2 <sup>†</sup>	75.3 <sup>†</sup>	65.6 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Black</b>	54.3	59.0 <sup>§</sup>	64.2 <sup>§</sup>	42.8 <sup>§</sup>	N/A	54.2 <sup>§</sup>	60.0 <sup>§</sup>	N/A	59.7 <sup>§</sup>	N/A
<b>Hispanic Origin</b>	35.6	32.2 <sup>§</sup>	41.5 <sup>§</sup>	47.2 <sup>§</sup>	49.2 <sup>§</sup>	36.3 <sup>§</sup>	66.5 <sup>§</sup>	42.7 <sup>§</sup>	47.0 <sup>§</sup>	41.6 <sup>§</sup>
<b>SEX</b>										
<b>Male</b>	67.1	58.7 <sup>†</sup>	63.4 <sup>†</sup>	66.3 <sup>†</sup>	68.1 <sup>†</sup>	61.7 <sup>†</sup>	71.5 <sup>†</sup>	66.5 <sup>†</sup>	71.7 <sup>†</sup>	62.8 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Female</b>	68.7	63.0 <sup>†</sup>	64.8 <sup>†</sup>	70.7 <sup>†</sup>	72.0 <sup>†</sup>	67.3 <sup>†</sup>	77.4 <sup>†</sup>	64.4 <sup>†</sup>	74.1 <sup>†</sup>	66.9 <sup>†</sup>

† Standard Error > 1.0    § Standard Error > 5.0

Source: *Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-age Population, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for States: November 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1988, 1986*. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education and Social Stratification Branch.

**Graph 3**  
**Reported Registration by Race and Hispanic Origin, in Colorado,**  
**Among Voting Age Population, 1986–2004 (%)**



Source: *Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population by Race, Sex, and Hispanic Origin for States: November 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1992, 1990, 1988, 1986*. U.S. Census Bureau: Population Division.

Latinas/os 18 years of age and older has gone from 62.2% in 1992 to 28.8% in 2004. (See Tables 5 and 6)

However, these percentages reveal only part of the picture. Two of the obstacles to voting experienced by Latinas/os have to do with age and citizenship requirements. In particular, the Latina/o population tends to be one of the youngest in the country, and includes a very high, and growing number of non-citizens. (These two factors along with other obstacles to voting as reported by the Census are explored in greater detail below). Collectively this youthfulness and higher percentage of non-citizens, results in a smaller electoral base among Latinas/os than any other racial/ethnic minority group in the U.S. Yet, the percentages of individuals registering to vote and voting are based on the total voting age population of each group. In other words, the figures reported in the tables above include non-citizens, and for this reason at least a portion of the gap between Latinas/os and non-Latinas/os can be explained by this problem with data.

Moreover, the figures in Tables 3-6 are based solely on percentages and reflect the portion of the adult age Latina/o population registering to vote and voting in Presidential elections. Concealed by these percentages is the rapid increase in the overall Latina/o population and the subsequent increases in the numbers of Latinas/os registering and voting from year to year. A look at the raw numbers reveal a steady increase in the numbers of Latinas/os registering to vote and voting in each election; however, when taken as a percentage of the overall adult age population these figures indicate stagnation and gradual decline. Therefore, when we examine the data, removing the non-citizen population, we see a 20-30% difference in the percentage of Latinas/os registering and voting in any given election cycle. That is, looking at the political behavior of only those Latinas/os who meet age and citizenship requirements for eligibility, indicates that of the total adult Hispanic citizen population in the U.S., 64% registered to vote in 2004 and 47.2% actually voted.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the percentage of adult age Hispanic citizens registering to vote increases from 58.6% in 1996 to 64% by 2004, and the percentage of adult age Hispanic citizens who actually vote increases from 44% in 1996 to 47.2% in 2004. All in all, these findings suggest that in examining voting behavior data on Latinas/os we need to be conscious of which population is being measured, as well as the enduring obstacle of citizenship for Latina political participation. The next section examines these obstacles more thoroughly.

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<sup>9</sup> To be clear, the data reported by the U.S. Census which is used as the basis of the graphs in the previous pages on registration and voting, indicates that of the total adult Hispanic population only 35% registered to vote in 2004 and 28% actually voted. However, as stated above, this information reported by the Census and used widely among national organizations and academics, includes non-citizens, in their estimation of the "total adult Hispanic population." When we remove non-citizens from the calculation, we see that the trends in registration and voting among Latinas/os increase, especially since 1996.

**Table 5**  
**Reported Voting Age by Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex: U.S.**  
**Presidential Elections, 1968–2004 (%)**

	'04	'00	'96	'92	'88	'84	'80	'76	'72	'68
<b>VOTED</b>	58.3	59.5	54.2	61.3	57.4	59.9	59.2	59.2	63.0	67.8
<b>RACE</b>										
<b>White</b>	65.8	61.8	56.0	63.6	59.1	61.4	60.9	60.9	64.5	69.1
<b>Black</b>	56.3	56.8	50.6	54.0	51.5	55.8	50.5	48.7	52.1	57.6
<b>Hispanic Origin</b>	28.0	27.5	26.7	28.9	28.8	32.6	29.9	31.8	37.5	N/A
<b>SEX</b>										
<b>Male</b>	56.3	58.1	52.8	60.2	56.4	59.0	59.1	59.6	64.1	69.8
<b>Female</b>	60.1	60.7	55.5	62.3	58.3	60.8	59.4	58.8	62.0	66.0

Source: Current Population Report Series P20, nos. 192, 253,322,370,405,440,466,542; November 1996 Current Population Survey; John A. Garcia, *Latino Politics in America: Community, Culture, and Interests*, (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) tab. 71, p.118. U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. *Current Population Survey, Table A-6 Reported Voting and Registration for Total and Citizen Voting-Age Population: Presidential Elections 1980-2004*. U.S. Department of Commerce

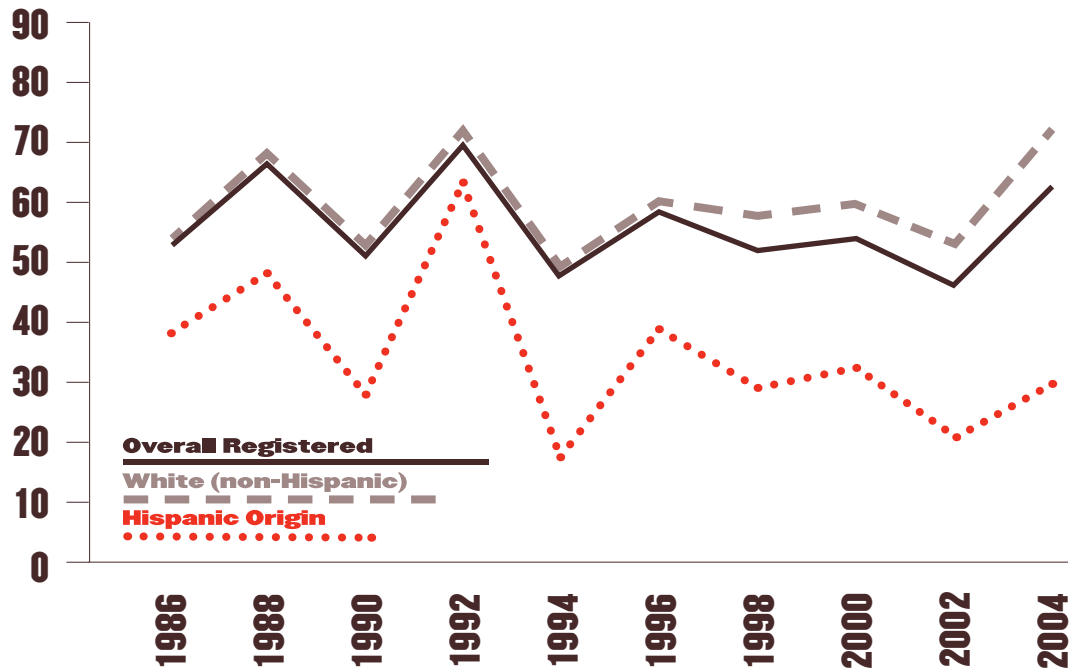
**Table 6**  
**Reported Voting by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex in Colorado,**  
**Among Voting Age Population, 1986–2004 (%)**

	'04	'02	'00	'98	'96	'94	'92	'90	'88	'86
<b>OVERALL REGISTERED</b>	61.7	45.7 <sup>†</sup>	53.6 <sup>†</sup>	52.1 <sup>†</sup>	58.8 <sup>†</sup>	46.5 <sup>†</sup>	68.8 <sup>†</sup>	50.6 <sup>†</sup>	65.4 <sup>†</sup>	52.7 <sup>†</sup>
<b>RACE</b>										
<b>White</b> (non-Hispanic)	71.3	52.6 <sup>†</sup>	59.4 <sup>†</sup>	58.1 <sup>†</sup>	60.2 <sup>†</sup>	48.5 <sup>†</sup>	71.5 <sup>†</sup>	52.5 <sup>†</sup>	67.5 <sup>†</sup>	53.8 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Black</b> (non-Hispanic)	45.6	41.3 <sup>§</sup>	46.8 <sup>§</sup>	28.0 <sup>§</sup>	N/A	35.9 <sup>§</sup>	50.4 <sup>§</sup>	N/A	54.7 <sup>§</sup>	N/A
<b>Hispanic origin</b>	28.8	20.7 <sup>§</sup>	33.0 <sup>§</sup>	28.4 <sup>§</sup>	38.8 <sup>§</sup>	17.2 <sup>§</sup>	62.2 <sup>§</sup>	27.7 <sup>§</sup>	47.0 <sup>§</sup>	37.8 <sup>§</sup>
<b>SEX</b>										
<b>Male</b>	60.1	45.4 <sup>†</sup>	53.1 <sup>†</sup>	50.6 <sup>†</sup>	57.3 <sup>†</sup>	47.5 <sup>†</sup>	66.6 <sup>†</sup>	49.9 <sup>†</sup>	63.4 <sup>†</sup>	51.5 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Female</b>	63.3	45.9 <sup>†</sup>	54.0 <sup>†</sup>	53.6 <sup>†</sup>	60.4 <sup>†</sup>	45.4 <sup>†</sup>	70.7 <sup>†</sup>	51.2 <sup>†</sup>	67.1 <sup>†</sup>	53.8 <sup>†</sup>

† Standard Error > 1.0    § Standard Error > 5.0

Source: *Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin for States*: November 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1988, 1986. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education and Social Stratification Branch.

**Graph 4**  
**Reported Voting by Race and Hispanic Origin, In Colorado, Among**  
**Voting Age Population, 1986–2004 (%)**

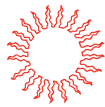


Source: *Reported Voting and Registration of the Total Voting-Age Population in States by Race, Sex, and Hispanic Origin: November 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1996, 1994, 1992, 1990, 1988, 1986.* U.S. Census Bureau: Population Division.

**Table 7**  
**Reported Voting and Registration for Hispanic Population,**  
**18 Years and Over, by Citizenship: U.S. Presidential Elections,**  
**1980–2004 (%)**

	'04	'00	'96	'92	'88	'84	'80	
<b>REGISTERED</b>	<b>Total Adult Age Hispanics</b>	34.9	34.9	35.7	35.0	35.5	40.1	36.3
	<b>Hispanic Citizens</b>	64.0	57.3	58.6	62.5	59.1	61.4	56.0
<b>VOTED</b>	<b>Total Adult Age Hispanics</b>	28.0	27.5	26.8	28.9	28.8	32.7	29.9
	<b>Hispanic Citizens</b>	47.2	45.1	44.0	51.6	48.0	50.0	46.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. *Current Population Survey, Table A-6 Reported Voting and Registration for Total and Citizen Voting-Age Population: Presidential Elections 1980-2004*. U.S. Department of Commerce



## THE IMPACT OF CONTINUING OBSTACLES ON LATINA POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND KEY FACTORS IN MOBILIZATION

While these figures give us a more sophisticated understanding of Latina and Latino voting behavior, it is also important to consider the obstacles that continue to prevent Latinas/s from expanding their political base. Among the key obstacles to Latina/o political participation, four factors stand out prominently, two of these are structural restrictions (the relative youth of Latinas/os, and the high and increasing percentage of non-citizens) and two are what Political Scientists refer to as resource restrictions that increase the “opportunity costs” associated with voting (the lower levels of education, and the lower levels of income) (Verba and Nie 1972, Verba Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Among those Latinas/os eligible to vote, lower levels of education has proven most significant in increasing the “opportunity costs” of voting and thereby decreasing the likelihood of participating in this manner (Garcia 1997, Nelson 1979, Pantoja, Ramirez and Segura 2001).

With respect to age, Latinas/os in Colorado and around the country represent one of the youngest populations with a large percentage of persons below the voting age. In 2004, the median age for Latinas/os was 26.9 years – 13 years younger than the median age for Non-Hispanic whites (American Community Survey Reports 2007). In addition, Mexican Americans, who comprise more than half of all Latinas/os in Colorado, represent the youngest population in the country, with an average median age of 25.3 years (American Community Survey Reports 2007). In terms of the voting age population in Colorado, approximately one-third of Latinas/os are currently under 18, and thus ineligible to vote (34.3%), (American Community Survey Reports 2007).

In Colorado, there are approximately 391,000 Latinas/os of voting age, and approximately 198,000 of these are Latinas. Practically, this means that Latinas can constitute no more than 6.5% of the total electorate (while Latinas/os as a whole could comprise 12.5%) (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). In reality, given the additional barriers to voting, including the opportunity costs of time, education, income, that are significant in deterring voting among marginalized populations – the Latina/o share of the state electorate represents about 8% in most recent general elections (Suro, Fry, and Passel 2005). If we compare these figures with their total population in the state, we see that while Latinas/os make up about one-fifth of the state population in Colorado, because they tend to be younger, they comprise only 12.5% of the total voting age population, and less than 9% of the actual electorate (U.S. Census Bureau 2000).

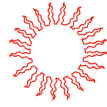
Education is a significant variable in explaining voting behavior in large part because higher levels of education reduce the “costs of information,” such as knowledge of the election process, understanding of the mechanics of voting, knowledge of the candidates, parties and central issues in a given election; thereby increasing the likelihood an individual will vote (Verba and Nie 1972, Garcia 2004). By extension, lower levels of education increase these costs and decrease the likelihood of participation in the electoral process. This is true across all ethnic and racial groups in the

U.S. and among both men and women. Among Latinas/os in the U.S., approximately 60% of those aged 25 or older have a high school degree, as compared with 84% of the general population and 89% of non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). Similarly, while more than 40% of the Latina/o population aged 25 or older does not have a high school degree, this percentage is even higher among Mexican and Central Americans (47.6% and 47.2% respectively) (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). These figures are important to the evaluation of voting behavior among Latinas/os because they suggest less formal education among the population and indicate an additional barrier to increasing their political mobilization.

Among voters, income tends to have a similar effect to that of education; namely, the more income a voter possesses the greater the probability that they will vote and participate in the electoral process. In 2006, the average income of Latina/o households was less than the general population (\$35,929 as compared to \$44,684), and less than the non-Hispanic white population (\$48,784) (US Census Bureau 2004). Similarly, a greater number of Latinas and Latinos are currently under the poverty level than whites (22% as compared to 8%) (US Census Bureau 2004).

Compounding these age, education, and income barriers in the population is the high and increasing percentage of foreign-born persons who are not citizens. Nationally, approximately 28% of the Latina/o population in 2007 are foreign born and have not become citizens, as compared with only 2% of the non-Hispanic white population who are foreign born and non-citizens (American Community Survey Reports 2007). In Colorado, approximately 29.8% of the population are currently foreign born and non-citizens (US Census Bureau 2004). While it is important to underscore that that majority of Latinas/os in the country are native – either natural borne citizens or naturalized – this population of non-citizens is significant and contributes to the large population of Latinas/os who are ineligible to vote or hold public office. It is also important to note that the majority of Latinas/os who are foreign born entered the U.S. after 1990. This means that the demographic profile of Latina/o communities has changed dramatically in the past two decades (increasingly younger, more female, and more non-citizens), making older models of political mobilization predicated on the experiences of Latinas/os with lengthy generations of U.S. born families, less relevant for the interests and experiences of these contemporary communities. It also serves as a reminder of the need for new models of mobilization that address these changing dynamics, and specifically take into consideration the role Latinas play in these shifts.

In the end, successful mobilization strategies can mitigate the obstacles to voting and increase political participation. In particular, an individual's motivation to vote can be increased via contact with organizations, leaders, and political parties who strategically choose to activate specific individuals or groups. Moreover, as Political Scientists have demonstrated both Latinas and Latinos who identify and are engaged with Latina/o organization (at the local or national level) and with Latina/o leaders and advocates, tend to develop strong attachments and become more likely to engage in electoral politics (Garcia 2004, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In particular, organizations can decrease the "opportunity costs" associated with voting and those affecting Latinas/os by virtue of their lower levels of education by developing workshops, resources, and information targeted to Latina/o voters. In other words, these organizations can increase the level of political education among Latinas/os, thereby increasing their likelihood of voting and participating in the political process. Finally, research suggests that those individuals who are directly contacted and encouraged or directed toward participation (particularly by leaders or organizations they identify with) are more likely to feel motivated to vote and in turn more likely to participate in the electoral process (Garcia 2004).



## CASE STUDY IN LATINA POLITICAL MOBILIZATION: THE LATINA INITIATIVE, DENVER, COLORADO

Given what is known about the history of Latina political participation in the U.S., the obstacles to participating in the electoral process, and the successful strategies for mobilization, organizations which understand these obstacles and develop relevant and sustained programs to deal with them are vital to the future of Latino and Latina politics. The Latina Initiative represents such an organization. In what follows, the history and work of this organization over the past five years are examined, as well as their impact on the registration and voting patterns of Latinas in Colorado.

The Latina Initiative was founded in 2002 as a community based organization dedicated to increasing the civic participation of Latinas in Colorado and to advancing the leadership of Latinas in the political life of the state. While Latinas had already established a long history of participation in non-traditional political venues in Colorado, and many had served in significant supporting roles in political parties and campaigns, few were recognized as leaders in the realm of electoral politics. At the time, several national political organizations such as the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SWVREP) and the National Association of Latino/a Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) had already conducted targeted registration and mobilization campaigns in highly concentrated Latina/o communities in Denver and surrounding counties. However, these campaigns were temporary, beginning and ending in the months immediately preceding the general elections, and they relied on a model of work that was centered on Latino men, with no attempt to remedy the continual marginalization of Latinas in the political process. Moreover, Latina/o families in Colorado paralleled those across the country inasmuch as Latinas often served as the cultural centerpiece of these families and the informal social networks that linked families locally, nationally, and internationally (Interview with Katherine Archuleta 2007).

It was in this context that the Latina Initiative emerged. That is, the Latina Initiative was attentive at its inception to drawing out and expanding the largely nascent Latina/o vote, while addressing the historic marginalization of Latinas from the political process. Philosophically this meant that the definition of civic engagement which centered only on registration and voting (and was the hallmark of voter mobilization drives) would be insufficient. In effect, the Latina Initiative drew on a broader approach to civic engagement that sought to develop Latinas' political voice, to foster leadership and confidence in themselves as political actors, and supply them with the tools to sustain their political participation even after the election cycle. (Interview with Katherine Archuleta 2007). As Katherine Archuleta, one of the founders of the Latina Initiative, described it:

We aren't a voter registration project. We are a project to promote civic engagement and pulling the lever for whatever candidate is the last stage in the process. We are talking about the candidates, the policy making process, and not relying on others to achieve power, but really expanding the power of Latinas as voters. We are different from others. We are there year round, preparing our women for civic engagement year round (Interview with Katherine Archuleta 2007).

Programmatically, the Latina Initiative pioneered a model for interaction that put this political focus into practice and departed from traditional registration and mobilization drives by targeting low-income, low-propensity Latina voters. They developed a plan predicated on the role of Latinas as the centerpiece of families and of social networks, which bound together Latina/o communities. The plan, known as the “Latina Voting Circle,” began by focusing on a small group of politically inactive Latinas (typically family, friends or coworkers of the organizers) and engaging them in the political process through informal conversation and networking. The goal was to provide these women with a safe and trusted environment to learn about the political process, the issues affecting them, and the tools to participate in the process. By connecting with Latinas in small and intimate settings (i.e. over dinner or coffee, while doing errands) and via persons familiar to them (i.e. their friends, cousins, neighbors) the Latina Voting Circle demystified the electoral process, while inspiring confidence so that these women could act as promoters to their extended social networks. In the end, the initial group of women would be trained to contact and engage other members of their families, most notably other women in their networks of friends, coworkers, and neighbors who were not active political participants, and repeat the process – connecting, inspiring, educating, registering and training them to become engaged in the political process (Interview with Katherine Archuleta 2007).

This field plan was combined with targeted mailings to Latina households in English and Spanish, phonebanking, and an “earned media” campaign consisting of press conferences with high profile Latino elected officials and the distribution of campaign yard signs which read “I’m Latina and I Vote/Soy Latina y Yo Voto.” In the end, “a Latina becomes part of the Latina Voting Circle and commits to bring 10 friends and/or family members with her to the polls, thereby increasing the civic involvement within families and community one Latina at a time” (Fact Sheet 2006).

This initial model of voting was significant both because it placed Latinas at the center of the work, thereby addressing their historic marginalization in previous mobilization efforts, but equally because it relied on their position as the center of their respective families and extended networks. As such, this model deviated from previous efforts in being “culturally relevant and family-centric” (Fact Sheet 2006). While the Latina Voting Circle was a key component of the Latina Initiative from its origins, the organization also

distinguished itself from other statewide and national Latino mobilization efforts by expanding its understanding of civic engagement beyond registration and voting. That is, by 2004 the organization had formulated a more sophisticated approach to engaging Latinas in politics, expanding from a field and media campaign (targeting low-income, low-propensity Latina voters) during general elections to a series of programs emphasizing political awareness and engagement all year long. In particular, the Latina Initiative expanded its work in three areas: education, mobilization, and advocacy.

In an effort to expand the information available to Latinas, and to reduce the “costs of information” that serves as a continual obstacle to political participation, the Latina Initiative organized candidate debates, political training (for activists and potential candidates), issue oriented workshops, and a three day annual conference which brought together low-income Latinas with academic and political professionals to discuss the most up to date resources on issues of concern to Latinas (i.e. health care, immigration, K-12 education, etc.). To enhance its mobilization (particularly the registration and voting of Latinas) efforts the Latina Initiative worked collaboratively with allied service organizations in developing a bilingual voting guide and expanded its targeted outreach to include counties outside the traditional sites of Denver and Boulder. The organization also increased the number and types of mailings directed at low-income Latina households, including mailings on absentee balloting, and increased the number of canvassers reaching individual Latinas in their homes. Finally, the organization added a new advocacy campaign that would manifest itself in both a debate “boot-camp,” training Latinas how to engage others (including media and legislators) on issues of concern to them, and a one-day Latina/o advocacy day that trained Latinas/os in issue advocacy and brought them into contact with state legislators (Interview with Dusti Gurule 2007).<sup>10</sup>

By 2006 the work of the Latina Initiative resulted in contact with 33,569 low-income and low-propensity Latinas across Colorado and the registration of 941 new Colorado voters (Ridder Braden 2007).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the bilingual ballot guide was distributed to over 14,000 voters prior to the 2006 election. Of the more than 33,000 Latinas contacted via mailing, phonebanking, or direct canvassing, 7,589 voted after being contacted by the organization (Ridder Braden 2007). This reflected an overall increase in the numbers of hard to reach voters over turnout in the 2002 general election (Ridder Braden 2007). Among these voters, 3,359 were Latinas

<sup>10</sup> Administratively, the Latina Initiative also became more sophisticated in this period, garnering its status as an official tax-exempt non-profit organization with an independent board of directors, and developing important local, state and national partners that expanded the funding revenues of the organization far beyond the initial \$100,000 seed grant it received during the first year of operation (Interview with Dusti Gurule 2007).

<sup>11</sup> According to an analysis conducted by a local consulting firm, among all the organizations in Colorado conducting voter contact programs between 2004-2006, almost 4,000 new Coloradans were registered to vote. This means that Latina Initiative was responsible for one-quarter of all those newly registered voters in this period. Moreover, among those organizations nationally that received voter registration funding through the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Latina Initiative had the highest success rate (Ridder Braden 2007).

who had never before voted in a non-presidential election, and 825 Latinas who had never voted at all (Ridder Braden 2007). Moreover, in the twelve low-propensity voting precincts in Denver county targeted by Latina Initiative in 2006, the turnout rate among Latinas was notably improved, particularly as compared to turnout among Latinas in low-propensity precincts not targeted by the organization (Ridder Braden 2007).

In 2007, the Latina Initiative once again expanded its understanding of civic engagement in important ways – this time increasing the scope of their programming to include immigrant women and young Latinas. Recognizing the needs of immigrant Latinas and young Latinas to develop and express their political voice, the Latina Initiative partnered with local and national organizations to implement a “civic participation campaign” in Colorado aimed at increasing naturalizations among Latina/o immigrants while organizing their own Latina youth group.

The civic participation drive, entitled “Ya es Hora ¡Ciudadania!,” is a nationwide effort to increase the political participation of Latinas/os and is focused principally on assisting eligible legal permanent residents apply for U.S. citizenship (Ya es Hora ¡Ciudadania! 2007).<sup>12</sup> The campaign emerged in the wake of the immigration rallies in 2005 and 2006 and operates through the formation of steering committees in eight states with significant Latina/o immigrants, who implement the campaign. The Latina Initiative is a member of the Colorado steering committee and as a partner in the campaign has organized and led several citizenship classes and conducted informational workshops for immigrants (Interview with Dusti Gurule 2007).

A parallel program embarked on by the Latina Initiative in 2007 (in partnership with the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity and Reproductive Rights –(COLOR) targets young Latinas who are also prevented from voting because of age restrictions but who are interested in expressing their political voice. The program, whose acronym is LIPS (Latinas Increasing Political Strength), engages young Latinas in the low-income neighborhood of west Denver in community action and civic participation. In particular, in the past year young Latinas in the program have volunteered at community events, helped to canvass Latina/o neighborhoods in anticipation of the November election, and met with elected officials as part of the Latina/o Advocacy Day described above. While the program is still in its early stages, the Latina Initiative made it a point to target young Latinas as part of their annual “Serious Issues, Serious Women” conference and this year offered a host of new workshops in the conference focusing on the needs and interests of young Latinas (Interview with Dusti Gurule 2007).

Both of these new ventures have been met with enthusiasm from participants, signaling the need among immigrants and younger women for viable opportunities for political expression. As Dusti Gurule, Executive Director of Latina Initiative surmised, “once you engage that portion of the community that traditional politics overlooks, you find that they are hungry to be a part of something and be active” (Interview with Dusti Gurule 2007).

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<sup>12</sup> The campaign was spearheaded and funded by several national organizations, principally the National Association of Latino/a Elected Officials (NALEO), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the We are America Alliance, along with major Latina/o media outlets including Univision, Entravision and Impremedia (Ya es Hora ¡Ciudadania! 2007).



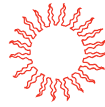
## CONCLUSION

Latinas are an important population both to the Latina/o communities situated across the country, and to the future of the state of Colorado. Demographically, Latinas play a significant role in the population expansion in the state, while culturally they lie at the heart of families and social networks that serve as support mechanisms in the broader Latina/o community. However, until recently Latinas had few opportunities to engage with the formal channels of electoral politics and were left to develop their political identity and express their concerns and interests via non-traditional political venues.

For years both *de facto* and *de jure* forms of discrimination, including language restrictions, literacy tests, and overt intimidation, kept Latinas from registering to vote and actually voting in significant numbers. Despite their active history of political participation in mutual aid societies, in labor unions, and social protest movements in Colorado they were excluded from the formal electoral processes. This began to change in the 1970s, especially as passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1975 Voting Rights Act remedied some of the more overt legal barriers to participation; however, the absence of mobilization campaigns targeted at Latinas kept their registration and voting numbers relatively low over the last thirty years. To the degree that groups such as the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project have engaged in targeted mobilization in Latina/o communities in Colorado these have largely engaged Latino men, have been temporary, or have only sought to increase voter registration and participation at the ballot box without a greater attention to long term civic engagement.

The Latina Initiative of Denver, Colorado represents a promising model for addressing the obstacles that continue to restrict Latina political participation and mobilizing them using culturally relevant strategies. In effect, this model of mobilization used by the Latina Initiative places Latinas at the center, engages them as political subjects – building their identity, as well as providing them with education and information resources on issues key to them, trains them in issues and advocacy, and registers them to vote. In effect, this model sustains their political participation well beyond the ballot box while mitigating important obstacles such as lower levels of education that increase their opportunity costs to voting. Recent programming from the Latina Initiative continues to address important obstacles to Latina political participation, and broaden the possibilities for long term civic engagement among Latinas in Colorado even further.

In the end, the face of Colorado is changing and Latinas are a significant part of that change. Moreover, immigration and fertility rates among Latinas/os ensure that they will constitute an even greater percentage of the population in subsequent decades. However, without meaningful channels for political incorporation, Latinas and Latinos will continue to experience political marginalization. Organizations such as the Latina Initiative are key to both Colorado politics and to the country, by insuring that Latinas and Latinos have the opportunities to fully participate in the American political process at all levels, and that the voices of this population are taken seriously.



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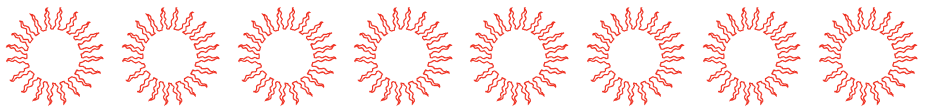
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